

How to Worship God

Purpose of the Series

In the prior series, “The Christian Assembly”, I talked about how the original early Christian gatherings in the 1st century after the death and resurrection of Jesus consisted of meeting at one of the more mature member’s homes, each person sharing something, and enjoying a meal together with thanksgiving about what Jesus did for them—yet all modern church services differ from this. This series aims to explore the question: What needs does worship fulfill in the lives of Spirit-filled Christians? While Christ gives us much freedom in how we live our lives, we must first answer this question *before* we can answer, “How do we to worship God at church?” This series seeks to answer the following:

- Why does worship differ from one church to another?
- How did worship differ between the eras of the Spirit (the Garden before the fall, the time of sin before Christ, and the era of the indwelling of the Spirit)?
- Is it required by Christians to worship to stay spiritually healthy?
- What are the “parameters” of worship? (e.g. Is music required? Can a person do it alone or does it require a group? Is one atmosphere more conducive than others? Is it to God or for God?)
- Is the “music and entertainment” version of church wrong?
- What is the relationship between obedience and worship?
- Is/should there be a difference between the worship of the OC and NC? One of the themes of “The Withered Fig Tree” is that the Old and New Covenants are *very* different from each other; therefore, I would tend to think so.

Part 1: What does it mean to Worship God?

This episode aims to summarize pre-Christian worship and modern Christian worship. To start with, I searched YouTube for “what is worship”. Of the many results, I did find some common themes: 1) [worship is not supposed to be entertainment](#), 2) [worship is obedience and sacrifice](#), and 3) [worship as an overflow of our hearts](#). This is interesting and will help us understand modern church worship.

I. Worship before Christ

- a. Did Adam and Eve worship God? It would be odd to say “no”. We don’t see either of them falling prostrate before God, at least not before the Fall. Gen 3:8 seems to imply they used to walk with God in the cool of the day. That’d be cool, right, to walk and talk with God? After the Fall, with their newfound knowledge of Good and Evil, their behavior changes, and their fear of God dominates their relationship (i.e. they hid from God and God pronounced judgement on them).

- b. Before the Old Covenant. Gen 22 – the first use of a Hebrew word for worship, “עָבַד *hāwâ*”, is used. It’s doubtful that people would define this as “worship”: Abraham does up to Mount Moriah prepared to sacrifice his son, but God provides the sacrifice. This is a clear foreshadowing of God providing his son, likely in the exact same location, two thousand years later, nevertheless, we see three important elements of OC worship: an altar, fire, and a sacrifice.
- c. Under the OC.
 - i. Lev 9:7 epitomizes priestly worship under the OC: *Moses said to Aaron, “Come to the altar and sacrifice your sin offering and your burnt offering and make atonement for yourself and the people; sacrifice the offering that is for the people and make atonement for them, as the Lord has commanded.”*
 - 1. Direct Command for Sacrifice – This verse reflects the heart of the priestly role in the temple — offering sacrifices for atonement and intercession on behalf of the people.
 - 2. Different Types of Sacrifices – The sin offering and burnt offering represent two key types of Old Testament sacrifices: 1) Sin Offering – For purification and forgiveness of sins (Lev 4), 2) Burnt Offering – A total offering to God, symbolizing complete devotion (Lev 1).
 - 3. Atonement – The purpose of the sacrifices was to secure reconciliation between God and His people.
 - 4. Priestly Mediation – Aaron, as high priest, stood between God and the people, pointing to the priestly function of intercession and mediation.
 - ii. Psalms 100:4 epitomizes what the people were to do: Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.
 - iii. Come to the temple.
 - iv. Have or make your heart right by filling it with thanksgiving.
 - v. Praise the name of God.
 - vi. Therefore, under the OC, worship activity different types of sacrifices done by priests at the altar in the temple.

II. What do Liturgical churches think?

- a. I would say this series is mostly done with Evangelical and Non-denominational churches in mind but let’s start briefly with the Catholic and Orthodox churches.
- b. Catholic and Orthodox services are centered around the Eucharist, which is the culmination of the service. Hymns, homilies, and creed recitals that are done before the Eucharist are meant to prepare the congregation for communion.
- c. The ordinary bread and blood become the sacrifice. The Eucharist is prepared on the altar and becomes Christ’s flesh and blood—Christ is offering himself again as a sacrifice.
- d. Worship is therefore communal, sacramental, and liturgical (formalized procedures for public worship).

III. Worship in Modern Evangelical and Non-denominational churches

- a. Members of these churches tend to offer wide and varied elements of worship. Basically, anything done at church is worship, and things in life where one devotes themselves to God are worship.
- b. As described in the prior series, churches are “vertically organized”. This means the rows of chairs that point to one location, the pulpit (often on a stage), and that congregants focus on the pulpit and do not communicate with each other.
- c. Characteristics of worship in these churches
 - i. Worship is centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ — His death, resurrection, and lordship.
 - ii. Songs, prayers, and sermons typically emphasize salvation through faith in Christ and the believer’s relationship with Him (e.g., John 14:6).
 - iii. Communion (Lord's Supper) is often celebrated regularly as a remembrance of Christ’s sacrifice but is purely symbolic (i.e. the Real Presence is not present).
 - iv. The reading, teaching, and application of God's Word are central to worship.
 - v. Expository preaching (verse-by-verse teaching) is common, but some churches also use topical sermons.
 - vi. The sermon is often the central element of the service, emphasizing both theological depth and practical application.
 - vii. Worship is often viewed as led by the Holy Spirit, not confined to a fixed liturgy.
 - viii. Spontaneous expressions of worship (e.g., raising hands, clapping, dancing) are encouraged. Charismatic and Pentecostal churches practice spiritual gifts during worship, such as: Speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, prophecy, and words of knowledge.
 - ix. Worship is informal and the atmosphere is relaxed. Dress code is generally casual. Services are welcoming to seekers and newcomers. Multimedia elements (screens, video, lighting) are often used to create an engaging atmosphere.
- d. Conflict over the type of music. Music is considered a key element of worship that can help or hinder an individual’s ability to worship, churches have divided over it and differentiate themselves as their worship style (e.g. as opposed to doctrine). If the assumption here is true, then this would be reasonable.
 - i. This is particularly the case in the United States, which is a melting pot of diverse cultures, each with their own style of music.
 - ii. There can be friction between age groups, i.e. old people’s music vs. contemporary music.
 - iii. Mixed congregations often settle on one form of music, leaving others feeling left out and unable to worship as they would like.

Next week: We’ll talk about how New Covenant worship defined in the Bible. There are a surprisingly few passages in the New Testament that contain “worship” and refer to the New Covenant.

Part 2: New Covenant Worship as defined in the Bible

Review: Last week I kicked off the series talking about the types of worship found in different periods (or eras) of mankind's relationship with God. Adam and Eve (before the Fall) simply walked with God. Hebraic worship involved a location, an altar, an intermediary, and a sacrifice. Modern liturgical religions, which have remained unchanged since the 4th century, share the elements of Jewish temple worship, but their sacrifice, the Eucharist, differs. Modern evangelical services, which have remained mostly unchanged since the Reformation, have fewer temple-elements, but since meet in large, dedicated-purpose buildings with "vertical" worship services (i.e. the focus is on whatever is happening center-stage).

I. What is Worship (again)

- a. Why "again"? Because I've already attempted to define this twice. In part 3 of the prior series, "The Christian Assembly", I gave the contemporary definition of worship: "Acts of devotion directed toward God that evoke a spiritual experience", and I gave a Temple-period Jewish definition: "A reverent, fearful, and humble devotion to God at the Temple."
- b. A more general definition. These two definitions apply only to the Hebrew God of the Bible. Is it possible to make a more general definition that would include pagan gods, human rulers, and idols?
 - i. Here's what I came up with: *"The reverent and submissive preparation and engagement with an idol, ruler, or deity."*
 - ii. Let's break it down: < could add superstition >
 1. Reverent: A deep-seated feeling of solemn respect. Reverence is often associated with feelings of fear or anxiety.
 2. Submissive: Ready to conform to the authority of someone or something else. Things that have no real or perceived impact on one's life cannot be submitted to.
 3. Preparation: There are elements that must be in place and things that must be done before the object of worship can even be approached. Preparation includes things like:
 - a. Prostrating oneself.
 - b. Dressing properly.
 - c. Ceremonial washings and consecrations.
 - d. Going to an agreed upon location.
 - e. Bringing a sacrifice.
 - f. An altar on which to prepare sacrifices.
 - g. An intermediary (aka a priest) to prepare sacrifices. The intermediary stands between public worshippers and the object of worship, wears different garbs, and has additional consecrations. All preparations which must be done in accordance to stricter instructions and which have more serious punishments for failures must only be done by someone very familiar with the requirements and proper training and experience.

4. Engagement: After the proper preparation, the object of worship can be approached, albeit with fear that the preparation was done to the satisfaction of the object. Singing and other joyful rituals may be performed.
5. Idols, rulers, and deities: Worship is strictly limited to these objects. There may be similar objects where something akin to worship is done, but one or more of the preceding elements are missing. In essence, only deities can be worshiped, as rulers must narcissistically claim the status of deity in some form to require worship from their subjects. Likewise, people of grant a god-like presence to an idol, and in many cases, the idol represents a deity.

iii. Why is it important to have a good general definition? To be able to distinguish worship from non-worship.

1. How is being a superfan not worship? Not reverent or submissive.
2. How is respect shown to a leader, like a president, not worship? If it's not in their presence, then there is no special location. Say you go to meet a leader at a special location (like a capitol office), the preparation is minimal and does not include things like sacrifices and priests. There are no ramifications for not meeting the leader, like imprisonment or confiscation of property.
3. How is respect shown to a spiritual leader not worship? The preparation is minimal and does not include things like sacrifices. There are no ramifications for not meeting the leader like disfellowship or loss of position.

c. In many ways, one can say that we do not worship in the New Covenant. At a minimum, one has to say NC worship differs greatly from OC worship and that the worship of pagan gods, which had elements like temples, altars, priests, physical sacrifices, prostration, and fear.

II. **A new kind of worship.** Let's look up verses in the New Testament that specifically discuss NC worship.

John 4:21-24: Jesus says: *"Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."*

- NC worship is at a different location (both the proper location at the temple in Jerusalem, and improper worship at the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim).
- NC worship is spiritual and not physical.
- NC worship is done with truth. I believe this refers to the false/partial way Jews had approach God, for example, how Moses could only see his back and the high priest would go only once a year behind the curtain. We could not see face to face because our sins were still present. Heb 10:4, *It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take*

away sins. Even now, our interactions with God are not perfect but will be in Heaven.
1Cor 13:12, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.”

The Sacrifice of Self

Romans 12:1-2: *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

- This is probably the most important NT verse on NC worship.
- Worship is no longer about external sacrifices but about offering oneself to God through righteous living and transformation by the Spirit.

1 Peter 2:4-5: As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

- Worship in the New Covenant is likened to spiritual sacrifices offered by believers as a royal priesthood.

Service to one another at Christian gatherings

Hebrews 13:15-16: *Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.*

- Like Romans 12, this describes a new type of personal sacrifice through living.
- Worship includes praise and confession of Christ's name, but also practical expressions of goodness and generosity.

Philippians 3:3: *For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve (latreia worship through service) God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.*

- True worship under the New Covenant is characterized by worshiping God in the Spirit, relying on Christ rather than external works or rituals.

Colossians 3:16-17: *Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

- Christian gatherings are a time to serve (latreia) one another.
- It includes singing, mutual teaching, and gratitude—all empowered by the indwelling of the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 14:26: *What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.*

- Worship in the New Covenant assembly is characterized by participation, edification, and spiritual gifts being used to build up the body of Christ.

Ephesians 5:18-20: *Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

- Worship is Spirit-filled, involving joyful singing and thanksgiving from the heart.

1 Timothy 2:1-2, 8: *I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people... Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing.*

- Worship includes prayer, intercession, and thanksgiving offered with holiness and unity.

Hebrews 10:24-25: *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

- Since God has given us everything, we need to worship him by ourselves, gathering with disciples is for fellowship and building each other up; and as such, is still necessary.

Part 3: A New Kind of Everything

Review: I gave yet another definition for worship. This one is very general and aims to address the essence of pagan temple, ruler, and idol worship and Jewish temple worship, while at the same time filtering out typical admiration or respect for individuals: *“The reverent and submissive preparation and engagement with an idol, ruler, or deity.”* The preparation part is very important and distinctive and contains elements like prostrating oneself, dressing properly, ceremonial washings, consecrations, going to a specific location, and bringing a sacrifice. The addition of an intermediary and their special preparation is also important, who has stricter preparations and ensures the worshippers fulfill their preparations. This is because there is great risk (at least from their own perspective) approaching a deity without properly fulfilling their demands.

The liturgical services of the Catholics and Orthodox churches contain these elements, and, therefore, they can make the claim that their adherents actually do “worship”. However, Protestants take pride in *not* having any of these elements in their services and their pastors and ministers are not priestly intermediaries; therefore, do they worship at all?

At best, Protestant, specifically, Evangelical and Non-denominational churches, can argue that worship under the New Covenant *is very different*. This argument is supported by Jesus’ statements in John 4 to the woman at the well and by the scriptures from Paul and Peter which metaphorically describe the sacrifice of oneself in the service of others as a form of worship. However, the vertical nature of their church services greatly obstructs the fulfillment of these “one another” passages.

Are the OC and NC that different? It’s a point I’ve made in my prior series, The Era of the Spirit, but in this series, I’ve only touched upon it. In my opinion, if a Christian cannot *strongly and definitively communicate the difference between the OC and NC, then **they don’t understand either of them.***

The book of Hebrews is the quintessential argument of the difference between the OC and NC. Rather than assume worship between the Old and New Covenants is different because the covenants themselves are different, today I will go section by section through Hebrews to show how the intention of the author was to differentiate the two covenants and show how one cannot have one foot in both covenants. Indeed, the NC is a new kind of everything contained within OC.

Note: Obviously, I don’t have the time to read through the entire book of Hebrews, so I’ll go through each section and highlight some key verses—but I do recommend you read through the book with this lens of “newness” in your personal time with God.

I. A new kind of revelation – Hebrews 1:1–4

God spoke in many ways in the past, but now He speaks through His Son—the ultimate and final Word.

Key verse: 1:1-2a: *In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...*

II. A new kind of messenger – Hebrews 1:5–2:18

Jesus is greater than angels and became human to redeem humanity, unlike angelic intermediaries of the Old Covenant.

Key verse: *To which of the angels did God ever say, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”?*

III. A new kind of rest – Hebrews 3:1–4:13

Not the Sabbath or rest from work or the Promised Land’s rest from building and war (these deter from obedience), but a deeper, spiritual rest from relating to God through obedience, but relating through grace, entered into by faith in Christ.

4:8-9 *For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. 9 There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God;*

IV. A new kind of high priest – Hebrews 4:14–5:10

Not from the line of Aaron, but according to the order of Melchizedek—eternal and perfect.

5:2-3 *He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people.* “he” is the human high priest.

5:8-9 *Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.*

“learned” and “once made perfect” – very controversial as God should know everything. Yet he had never lived as a mortal human until Jesus.

V. A new kind of teaching – Hebrews 5:11–6:20

Not based on elementary teachings of the law, but on growing through faith and hope in God’s promises.

6:1-2 Were they unable to teach the OC because of a lack of preparedness or effort? No. The OC, while comprehensible, is not *attainable*. They need to move on from the basic foundation established by the OC: 1) Repentance from acts that lead to death – things that require sacrifice, 2) faith in God – they had a general belief in God’s existence and authority, but without the fuller understanding of the Messiah, Jesus, 3) cleaning rituals -- when is actually unclean, 4) the laying on of hands – one would lay their hand on the head of the sacrifice, and 5) the

resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment – the spiritual afterlife, something completely lacking in the OC.

VI. A new kind of priesthood – Hebrews 7:1–28

A priesthood that brings perfection, unlike the Levitical one, because it is based on the power of an indestructible life.

VII. A new kind of covenant – Hebrews 8:1–13

The old is obsolete; the new is written on hearts, with true forgiveness and internal transformation.

VIII. A new kind of sacrifice – Hebrews 9:1–10:10

No more repeated animal offerings; Christ's once-for-all sacrifice cleanses the conscience.

IX. A new kind of confidence – Hebrews 10:11–39

We can now enter the Most Holy Place boldly, by the blood of Jesus, not with fear but with faith.

X. A new kind of faith – Hebrews 11:1–40

A faith not rooted in law-keeping or land promises, but in trusting God for better, heavenly realities.

XI. A new kind of discipline – Hebrews 12:1–29

God trains us as sons, not as distant subjects; we've come to a heavenly Zion, not Sinai's terror.

XII. A new kind of worship – Hebrews 13:1–25

Lived out through love, hospitality, purity, and sacrificial praise, centered on Jesus, outside the camp.

Heb 13:7-9a Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. 8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings.

Note how NC worship is very different than the tabernacle temple worship of the OC.

Part 4: The Sacrifice of Self for Others

Review: Last week I used the whole book of Hebrews to strongly differentiate the Old and New Covenants. Many sections can be drawn out in the book which each distinguish the two covenants in a strong and unique way. We went through twelve such distinctions. While most would agree the two are different, the NC Christian lifestyle they live still strongly resembles OC in areas like legalism and their struggle with their flesh (aka sinful nature). The greatest prophecy of the NC is found in Jeremiah 31:31-34, and this passage is quoted verbatim in Hebrews 8:8-12 (the longest quotation of OT scripture in the NT by far) and partially in Hebrews 10:16-17. The passage specifically states, *“It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors”,* and *“because they did not remain faithful to my covenant”*. Here the prophecy qualifies just how different the two covenants will be: unlike the first covenant which could not be followed individually or corporately, this new one could. About the New Covenant, the passage states, *“I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts”,* and *“No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.”* This further differentiates the old from the new: unlike the first covenant which was written on stone and paper and taught as knowledge and relationship as obedience and discipline, the new one will be written on people’s hearts and minds by God himself and all, regardless of stature or ability, will know him intimately. Does what you consider to be the NC fit this?

My purpose in differentiating the OC and NC, besides being an interesting and thought-provoking exercise, was to support the claim, “If the OC and NC are radically different, shouldn’t how one worships God in the two covenants also be radically different?”

Today: I will begin talking about what I believe worship in the NC encompasses.

I. The Purpose of Worship in the Old Covenant: To Prosper Physically

Let’s start with this question: what was the purpose of OC worship? Recall that the Greek word translated “worship” is προσκυνέω (pros-kew-neh-oh) and simply means “to prostrate oneself in the direction of a ruler, idol, or deity”. That is the physical action taken. But this came to represent what I presented in Part 2, “The reverent and submissive preparation and engagement with an idol, ruler, or deity.” In Part 1, I described the preparation and engagement parts:

- Go to the Temple (i.e. the Location) (Deut 26:2).
- Enter the gates “with thanksgiving and praise” (Psalm 100:4).
- Prostrate themselves (Deut 26:10, Psalm 95:6, 2Chron 7:3).
- Present their sacrifice to the Levitical priest (i.e. the mediator) (Deut 26:3).

- In the case of a burnt offering: Place their hand on the head of the animal, and for the priest, who had already consecrated (i.e. prepared) himself, to sacrifice the offering on the altar of God. (Levi 1:3–5 and Levi 9:7).
- In the case of a non-burnt offering: Declare and present the offering to the priest, recite a statement (Deut 26:1-11), and the priest lays the offering at the front of the altar.

What was the purpose of all this? To obey the Law and remain righteous in the eyes of God so to receive the promised blessings (Deut 28:1-14) instead of the curses (Deut 28:15-68).

Ironically, none of the blessings speak of closeness to or love from God. Go ahead and read it. They're great individual and corporate blessings, but they're all about prospering physically.

II. The Purpose of Worship in the New Covenant: To Prosper Spiritually

- a. One's first act of worship: Becoming saved

It's impossible to prosper spiritually if one is lost and separated from God and not even under the New Covenant itself. Therefore, the first act of preparation is to become saved. Let's recall some of Jesus' words:

John 3:16-18:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

John 4:23-24:

Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

John 14:16-17:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

We can see from these verses that once a person believes in the one God sent, they are saved and the Holy Spirit dwells within them. This is the New Covenant's analog of worship preparation in the Old Covenant. The location is the heart and mind of the individual. The sacrifice is Jesus' body and blood on the cross. The priest (not just any priest but the High Priest) is the risen Jesus (Heb 9:15, "*For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant*").

Where is prostration? There is none. Prostration is the ultimate act of vulnerability. One is totally open to attack when they are face down to the ground with their hands extended. This is

why it can be said that we do not worship under the NC, or that the worship of the NC is totally different from all other kinds of worship.

Instead, like Adam and Eve who walked with God for their “worship”, we can “*approach God’s throne of grace with confidence*” (Heb 4:16) and “*we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus*” (Heb 10:19). And, also very different from the OC, the sacrifice of Christ is sufficient for the whole world once and for all (Heb 9:25, “*Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own.*”).

b. Love the brothers and sisters

Jesus says in John 13:34-35:

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

What is love? That’s a big question indeed! Love is such an amorphous term. Perhaps you’ve heard that Greek has five words for love:

- 1) ἀγάπη (a’ga’pay): Selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love.
- 2) Φίλος (phil-os): Deep friendship, affectionate love, companionship.
- 3) Στοργή (stor-gay): Familial love, especially between parents and children.
- 4) ἔρως (air-os): Romantic or passionate love.
- 5) Ξενία (zen-ee’ah): Hospitality or love for the stranger/guest.

It’s kind of weird that English only has one word for these, but I guess the assumption is they’re different enough that context should be a sufficient differentiator. The question is, what do these words have in common at their core? I would say:

A sacrifice of oneself for the benefit of another or others.

Romans 12:1-2: *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Hebrews 10:24-25: *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

In two weeks (the 20th, I have an event to go to next Sunday), we’ll continue to define “worship” in the NC through the sacrifice of oneself.

Part 5: Spiritual Prosperity

Note: Last week I briefly met with Jordan Peterson after his talk in Loveland, Colorado. At the brief encounter I gave him a business card with my hypothesis of why God rejected Cain's offering. On the card was a link to a short private video about my idea of how this event fits into the overall Genesis creative narrative. For Dr. Peterson, I had to cut this video down to its bare minimum, but I'll add a link to the 15-minute version on my blog, theWitheredFigTree.com, for you to see. It goes along with my first livestream series, The Era of the Spirit.

Review of Part 4: In Part 4 of this series, "The Sacrifice of Self for Others", we talked about how the outcome of obedience to the Old Covenant was physical blessings (like food, fertility, and peace) whereas the outcome of obedience to the New Covenant was spiritual blessings (like salvation, justification, closeness to God, and the ability to help others). It's important to note that spiritual prosperity does not promise physical prosperity—in fact, Jesus promises things like suffering and persecution. We also saw that, unlike English which one has only one word for love, Greek has five of them and four are used in the New Testament to describe relationships between people (*agape*, *philos*, *storgay*, and *zenia*). *Agape* love is selfless, sacrificial, and unconditional; *philos* is for deep friendship and companionship; *storgay* is love in a family; and *zenia* is hospitality. There are many NT verses which uses these words of love, collectively called "the one another passages", to describe how the disciples are to sacrifice themselves for the betterment of their brothers and sisters, especially at their assemblies.

Today we'll talk more about spiritual prosperity and their connection to the "one another" passages.

I. Every Spiritual Blessing

Ephesians 1:3 says, *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."*

This simple unassuming passage contains another stark difference between the OC and the NC: In the NC, you get every blessing upfront while under the OC you had to gain them through obedience and likely would obtain curses instead. Did you know that you had every spiritual blessing immediately when you became a Christian? Most don't realize it. It's human nature to think that one must work hard and show their worth before receiving something good.

The reason we receive every spiritual blessing upfront and all at once, is because all spiritual blessings come from the Holy Spirit, and it is the Holy Spirit that indwells within us when we become Christians. Christians know that they become saved at this point but often think they must prove their worth through good deeds and holiness to receive further spiritual blessings—

but this thinking is backwards. The good deeds we do and any holiness we achieve are accomplished *by the Holy Spirit living in us*.

2 Corinthians 3:18: *And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

Remember from the creation account that we are made in God's image. In The Era of Spirit, I make the case that this meant God created mankind to house a part of His Spirit—the Holy Spirit—and it was this Spirit that was lost in Adam and Eve but restored by Christ's life, death and resurrection. As Christians, the Spirit has been restored in us, and we can now be transformed more and more into His image—but at His speed and will, not ours.

II. The Ecclesia is about ἀλλήλων (all-ay-lone, one another)

- Bring up slide with one-another passages

Hebrews 10:24-25: *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

In the Epistles, if you find ἀλλήλων it is written to the Ecclesia, which we now know was not a large church with rows of pews, but a small gathering in a house where a meal and conversation were shared.

It is the Spirit which allows us to help others find the Spirit in themselves. As with all human relationships that aren't surfcy and have the intention of helping, there will be stress, frustration, and friction. That's why a lot of the verses for the Ecclesia are about the "bearing side" of love. We all know and want the "delighted side" of love which comes naturally, but we need the "bearing side" of love—especially as that is the type of love others will need for ourselves.

Many are familiar with this passage from **Galatians 5:22-26:** *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.*

When reading the Epistles, we must remember they were written to be read aloud in the small house gatherings of the disciples. While this passage can be interpreted in a general sense, the specific case it was written for brothers and sisters meeting together to help each other be close to God. That takes love and joy, but it also takes peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. These last seven fruits address the stress and difficulty

of human relationships. It is very much like 1Cor 13:4-7, which is also written to the Ecclesia, but which is now more often associated with weddings: *Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*

The point is that it is the Spirit's fruit and the Spirit in us that does these things; and *most importantly, it is not by through worshipping God.*

III. Removing the Veil

What if a disciple is not enjoying the fruits (aka the blessings) of the Spirit? How are their fellow brothers and sisters supposed to help them? By all manner of self-help practicals and life-hacks, of course! No! By reminding them of the Spirit within them and leading them back to Him. How do you do that? It's difficult to say. As Jer 31:34 says:

No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest."

We read 2Cor 3:18 earlier, now let's read the full passage, verses 7-18. This is another great, Old Covenant vs. New Covenant passage, and I believe there's a hint at how we help others find the Spirit within the: by removing the veil.

Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!

Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away. But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Removing the veil means not being afraid to talk about the Spirit. It means not trying to help someone through human wisdom or experience but simply reminding someone of the deep truths of God and the Bible.

...one another (ἀλλήλων all-ay' lone)	Verses
Love one another	John 13:34; Rom 13:8; 1 Thes 4:9; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11, 4:7
Be devoted to one another in brotherly love	Romans 12:10
Honor one another above yourselves	Romans 12:10
Live in harmony with one another	Romans 12:16; 1 Peter 3:8
Accept one another	Romans 15:7
Be at peace with one another	Mark 9:50; Romans 12:18
Don't grumble against one another	James 5:9
Serve one another in love	Galatians 5:13
Carry one another's burdens	Galatians 6:2
Submit to one another	Ephesians 5:21
Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another	1 Peter 5:5
Encourage one another	1 Thes 5:11; Hebrews 10:25
Build up one another	Romans 14:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:11
Instruct (admonish) one another	Romans 15:14; Colossians 3:16
Exhort one another daily	Hebrews 3:13
Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs	Ephesians 5:19
Bear with one another in love	Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:13
Forgive one another	Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13
Do not lie to one another	Colossians 3:9
Confess your sins to one another	James 5:16
Pray for one another	James 5:16
Do not judge one another	Romans 14:13
Do not provoke or envy one another	Galatians 5:26
Do not slander one another	James 4:11
Do not bite and devour one another	Galatians 5:15

How does the typical large church gathering help us get closer to God? How does it create an environment where we can spur one another on? That is what we'll talk about next week.

Part 6: Worship in Large Vertical Assemblies of Christians

Review: Last week we did more comparing and contrasting of the Old and New Covenants. In the NC, you get every blessing upfront while under the OC you had to gain them through obedience and likely would obtain curses instead. This is a huge difference, although, in practice it seems like most Christians do not enjoy the blessings of the indwelling of the Spirit. This is also due to the difficulty in teaching the spiritual, intangible aspects of the Spirit (Jer 31:34). I also talked about how the Ecclesia is about ἀλλήλων (all-ay-lone, one another). Whenever you see “church” in the NT, replace it with “house gathering”; and whenever you see “one another”, insert “at your house gatherings” before it. For example, “love one another” becomes, “at your house gatherings, love one another”. Lastly, I spoke about “removing your veil”, which means to talk to others about the Spirit of God within.

I. Understanding Vertical vs. Horizontal Assemblies

I adopted this terminology for Dr. Tom Wadsworth (I put a link to his channel in the description), but here’s a table I made to explain the differences.

Term	Alternatives	Focus	Key words
<u>Vertical</u>	Stage-centered Pulpit-centered Platform model	The speaker(s) or song leader(s). A small percentage of the congregation servers as speakers or singers as they need to stand out. A small number of paid staff.	Monologue Passive Spectator Impersonal Educate Prop-up
<u>Horizontal</u>	Circle model Mutual gathering One-another model	The person speaking currently. Each person takes a turn with something to offer the group. No paid staff—maybe paid travelling preachers or teacher.	Dialogue Active Participator Relational Edification Build up

II. Let’s not Make superficial changes to a broken system

Otherwise known as, “putting lipstick on a pig”, we shouldn’t be consumed by the “sunken cost fallacy” when it comes to large churches with their large established buildings and their staff. The sunk cost fallacy is the tendency to continue pouring resources into a system based on the resources already spent, even when it would be more rational to abandon it. If it turns out the Christianity of small horizontal churches is not just another option, but the only option, then we have to be willing to move to it.

What is the evidence that small horizontal gatherings meet the needs specified in the Bible of individuals, but large vertical gatherings do not? Simply put, the Bible and history. Among other things, we've learned that worship is different under the New Covenant compared to the Old Covenant and this was demonstrated in the small horizontal gatherings of Christians from 1st to

the 3rd century. This helped them fulfill the "one another" passages of the Bible, of which there are more than 30. Also taking from history, we see large unbiblical changes in the church occur precisely at the time when they started meeting in large vertical assemblies. To be fair, the impetus of this was Emperor Constantine and the power and money that entered the church at the beginning of the 4th century. We don't know what would have happened if they had continued to meet in small house churches, but *we do know it wouldn't have happened* if they remained in small churches. Constantine transformed the small gatherings into large, centralized gatherings for the very purpose of controlling the masses—and this we've witnessed this phenomenon over and over throughout the ages and into modern times. In other words, it remains true that it is more difficult to control small, intimate gatherings.

III. The Primary Purpose of Large Vertical Assemblies

The primary purpose of large vertical assemblies is to worship God through song, preaching, teaching and the communion. As can be seen in the following table, all of the unique features of a large church become negative things in the long term, and the unique features that are absent cannot simply be added to large gatherings.

Activity	Large Vertical	Small Horizontal
<u>Preaching</u>	large number; higher quality; no interaction; scattering aimlessly; no connection; not personalized; able to hide; no "one another"; clergy/laity issues	small number; lower quality but more sincere; interaction and response; targeted to the needs; connecting personally; personalized; not able to hide; all about one another; all mature
<u>Communion</u>	higher quality charge; just symbolic elements of the meal; silent meditation	personalized remembrance; a whole meal; fellowship
<u>Teaching</u>	<Preaching>; large class size; no interaction	<Preaching>; small class size; interaction and clarification
<u>Singing</u>	<u>definitely higher</u> quality; emotional experience; able to hide; attention to performance; repetition is okay	lower quality; spiritual experience; not able to hide; attention to meaning; repetition absent
<u>Kids Church</u>	<u>definitely higher</u> quality; little parental involvement; weak relationship; difficult to find volunteers	more heartfelt; parental responsibility; direct relationship
<u>Praying</u>	few participate; weak association; able to hide	most participate; strong association; not able to hide

What then is accomplished in the common large vertical church assemblies of Christians? Do they accomplish the same things as small gatherings? Simply put, evangelism of the masses. This is the NT example: Jesus at the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus with the five thousand and the four thousand, Jesus with large crowds following him, the Apostles and the three thousand plus of Pentecost.

Would modern large churches say this is possible now? Probably not. In their gatherings, Christians highly outnumber non-Christians. Most pastors would say the conversion of non-Christians is best done in small groups anyway. This fact is the final nail in the coffin of large vertical assemblies.

Next week we'll talk more about the practicals of small house Christian assemblies.