

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

Preparation for Worship

By Bobby Witherington

From the perspective of the biblical time period under which we live, we affirm that we live in what has appropriately been called “The Gospel Age.” God now speaks to us **“through His Son,”** whom He has **“appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds”** (Heb. 1:1-2). And Jesus speaks to us through the **“New Covenant,”** which is now in effect by reason of His sacrificial death (Heb. 9:15-17). The Law of Moses, which was in effect from Mt. Sinai to the day of Pentecost, has been fulfilled (Matt. 5:17-18), blotted out, and nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14-17). The Levitical Priesthood which characterized the law of Moses has been succeeded by the Priesthood of Jesus Christ, and with **“the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law”** (Heb. 7:12). Consequently, we do not follow Moses’ law; to the contrary, we submit to **“the law of Christ”** (Gal. 6:2).

However, even though we do not submit to Moses’ law, it must be acknowledged that God, in His infinite wisdom, has preserved the Old Testament scriptures, and has informed us that they were **“written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope”** (Rom. 15:4). Indeed, there are many things we can learn from a study of the Old Testament. For example, a diligent study of the Old Testament should convince us that God always said what He meant, and always meant what He said! We also learn from the Old Testament that God never looked with favor upon any person who sought in any way to change or alter that which God had prescribed with reference to worship (cf. Gen. 4:4-5; Lev. 10:1-3, etc.).

As it related to the Jews drawing nigh to God, Exodus 19 is most interesting and informative. The time period was **“in the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt,”** and when they had come to **“the Wilderness of Sinai”** (Ex. 19:1). God **“called to”** Moses from the mountain and instructed him, **“Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine”** (Ex. 19:3-5, NKJV). God further said to Moses, **“Behold, I come to you in the thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever”** (Ex. 19:9). Moses was about to ascend to the top of Mt. Sinai, where he would receive from God the tables of the covenant, the ten commandments. This was to be a memorable occasion; the people would be able to witness the glory, the power, and the majesty of God. In a special sense, they were coming into His presence (Ex. 19:11)! In a very real sense, they were standing on **“holy ground”** (cf. Ex. 3:5)! This was not a time for levity or frivolity! Accordingly, the Israelites were commanded to **“consecrate”** themselves, **“wash their clothes,”** and **“be ready”** for that very momentous event (Ex. 19:10-11, 14-15). On **“the third day ... there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled,”** and the text further stated that **“Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain”** (Ex. 19:16-17). The events of Sinai were such that the people knew they were in the presence of God, and they were instructed to act accordingly.

Of course, we do not live under the law which God gave to Israel at Sinai. But we do serve the same God, and we must not forget the words of Jesus who told Satan, **“Away with you, Satan! For it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve”** (Matt. 4:10). We must **“worship the Lord,”** but we must not make the same mistake made by the scribes and Pharisees who worshiped God **“in vain”** – committing two grievous sins (1) honoring God with their lips while their hearts were **“far from”** Him, and (2) **“teaching as doctrines the commandments of men”** (Matt. 15:8-9).

At Sinai, when the Israelites appeared before God they were instructed to **“be ready”** (Ex. 19:11). In other words, God required that they make preparation for that great and grand occasion. In this, the gospel age, we must worship God **“in spirit and in truth”** (John 4:24). And this requires proper preparation.

What Preparation Should We Make?

1. Begin by developing the proper attitude toward worship. Worship (*proskuneo*) means **“to make obeisance, do reverence to.”** It is used to refer to the homage or reverence we pay to God, who is the father of our spirits (Heb. 12:9), in whom **“we live and move and have our being”** (Acts 17:28), from whom comes **“every good gift and every perfect gift”** (James 1:17), and who sent His **“only begotten Son”** to die on the cross to make possible the forgiveness of our sins (John 3:16; Heb. 2:9)! Properly understood, worship does not begin with a song or a prayer; it begins with an attitude of heart, without which no conduct is acceptable. Worship is not a family reunion, a time to giggle and pass notes; it is a drawing near to God!
2. Bring lives as free from sin as possible. Scripture says **to “pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting”** (1 Tim. 2:8). In the words of David, people should strive to **“worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness”** (Ps. 29:2). In plain language, we would point out that **“Saturday night revelry”** and **“Sunday morning worship”** are incompatible!
3. Study the Scriptures! Such is commanded, and it is a must if we are going to be able to **“rightly”** divide **“the word of truth”** (2 Tim. 2:15). Many people don’t get much out of the Bible classes or the sermons for the simple reason that they haven’t put much time in the study of the Scriptures. By all means, study your Bible class lesson before Sunday morning!
4. Purpose and prepare your contribution. **“Laying by in store”** as we have been prospered is one of the **“items of worship”** on **“the first day of the week”** (1 Cor. 16:1-2). However, each one must **“give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver”** (2 Cor. 9:7). This implies that proper giving is not to be a spur of the moment action based upon the emotions of the hour; giving should be planned, purposed, in keeping with one’s prosperity, and done cheerfully.
5. Prepare your clothes, lessons, etc. ahead of time. The Jews had their **“Preparation”** day (Luke 23:54), which generally preceded the Sabbath. It was a time of preparation for the proper observance of the Sabbath. We are not under the same covenant as the Jews, but there is a principle herein which is surely given **“for our learning”** (Rom. 15:4). Don’t wait until Sunday morning to start making preparation for worship, necessitating a last-minute mad scramble **“to get there on time,”** and arriving with frayed nerves, hardly in any frame of mind to worship God!
6. Sit where you can get the most out of services, and where you can make the greatest input to the services. Singing is congregational with all the worshipers **“speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs ...”** (Eph. 5:19). If one is so far in the back that he is singing solo, or cannot be heard by others, this part of the worship is surely hindered. An appropriate seating arrangement is not simply so that the singing will **“sound better”** – you see, there is a higher motive for the close blending of voices; namely it is the blessedness of united effort, the sweet communion of kindred spirits, as the songs of Zion swell heavenward!
7. Enter into worship reverently and wholeheartedly. Don’t let worship become commonplace or **“old hat”!** Develop the attitude of Paul, who said **“I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding”** (1 Cor. 14:15).

Conclusion: Properly understand, when we come together to worship God, we are standing on **“holy ground.”** The worship of God ought to be the highlight of our week. With proper preparation on our part, it will be! ■

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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