



The Trinity and Worship

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An Excerpt from Understanding the Trinity

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Assembly Bookshelf
2017

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Published by Assembly Bookshelf
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THE TRINITY AND WORSHIP

Most assuredly, the doctrine of the Trinity should teach us how we should worship. By understanding how the eternal Son, in His humanity, worshiped the Father, will teach us how we should worship the Father. Worship is not based upon our desires, but must be based upon the desires of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I'm sure some of you have seen, as you are driving through town, the different signs in front of different Church buildings. Many times one will see a sign that says "Traditional Worship" at 9:00 and "Contemporary Worship" at 11:00.

Doesn't that show us that in reality such worship is not worship for the "Lord," but is really worship for "ourselves?" We have different forms of worship because the people of God have their own tastes and desires. Some like to worship in this style and others like a different style. Is God so capricious that at 9:00, He desires Traditional worship, and at 11:00, He wants Contemporary worship? Does God change His desires like that? No, of course not. God is very clear about how we should worship, just as He is very clear about how we should gather together. God tells us He has given us everything pertaining to life and godliness. He tells us that through the Word of God, the man of God can be complete. Everything that we need to have concerning how we should meet and how we should worship, is all contained in God's Word.

So with that in mind let's begin our study by reading John 4:20-24. The Samaritan woman begins her discourse with the Lord Jesus by saying,

“Our fathers worshiped on this mountain and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus said to her, woman believe me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you don't know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming and now is when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such people the Father seeks to be his worshipers. God is Spirit and they that worship him must worship him in Spirit and in truth.”

Therefore, what we see here, is the Lord Jesus saying that something “new” is coming—something that hadn't been before. In fact, He says, it is even *now*. I think what He's referring to is this: the “hour that is coming” refers to the day when the Holy Spirit is poured out upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost. That is the future. The phrase “and now is” refers to the present time and that in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, for the Spirit had already been poured out upon Him without measure (Jn. 3:34 KJV). So we see a pattern developing here.

God is Spirit and those that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and Truth. Now there are many differences of opinion about what this means. In fact, in some of your Bible's you'll probably see God is spirit, and the word spirit is in the lower case, a small “s.” In some of your Bible's you'll see God is Spirit, and it you'll see that the word Spirit begins with a capital “S.” When the word Spirit is capitalized, it refers to the Holy Spirit, when it is in the lower case, it generally refers to the human spirit. The reason why some translations will have one or the other is because in the Greek language the distinction between the Spirit of God and the human spirit is not determined by either an uppercase “S” or a lower case “s.” Sometimes in the Greek manuscripts, every letter was in an upper case, or sometimes every letter was in a lower case. So you wouldn't know through capitalization, if the writer was referring to the Holy Spirit or not. The

translator would have to decide for himself from the context. So it became a matter of interpretation.

However, I think we will be able to see that John is referring to a combination of both. William Kelly speaks of this verse as follows:

“Not merely were spiritual life and redemption needful, but the Holy Ghost also; and accordingly here the Lord adds that “God is a Spirit;” and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”¹

Therefore, William Kelly sees this as referring, most assuredly, to the Holy Spirit. If that is true, then what the Lord is saying is that God is Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him by the Spirit and Truth, in other words, by the Person of the Holy Spirit.

Consequently, when the Lord says, “an hour is coming,” He is referring to a worship, in the future, that will be led by the Holy Spirit of God. Such worship had not occurred before that time because the Holy Spirit had not been given (Jn. 7:39), nor had the Holy Spirit been poured out upon the Church (Acts 1: 8 and 2: 1-2, 42). Such worship had only been done in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, according to his humanity. And that is why He says “...an hour is coming and now is.”

Christ had already been worshipping by the Holy Spirit, according to His humanity (Lu. 4:8). Our Lord did not do anything by His own initiative or creativity, but only according to the will of His Father, through the power or fullness of the Spirit (Jn. 8:28; 16:13; Lu. 4:1). Our Lord’s worship was the perfect worship and the worship that should be a pattern for us all. His was the true worship that was then

¹ William Kelly, *Lectures on the Church of God*, (Believers Bookshelf, Inc., Sunbury, Pa) pg. 136-137

present, and one day would become the worship of the Church on the day of Pentecost.

This teaches us that we should be careful not to bring our own *creativity* or initiative into our worship, for that is not the true worship the Father desires. We do not decide for ourselves what would make good worship. He gave us His Son to be our pattern, and He never did anything by His own creativity or initiative (even though His creativity would have been sinless and perfect).

If the Son would not be presumptuous in His worship, how much more should we not be presumptuous? Those who seek to introduce different styles of worship into the Church do not understand the true nature of worship. True worship is only done under the direction of the Holy Spirit according to the will of the Father, as revealed in Scripture. This will of God for our worship is revealed in I Cor. 11-14. If we would be true worshipers we must conform ourselves to these chapters. Worship should be done under the immediate leading of the Holy Spirit through the common priesthood of all believers by the operation of the spiritual gifts He has deposited amongst the saints. Worship is not done by natural talent, but by the manifestation of the Spirit.

True worship is not enhanced by the display of natural talent. True worship is not led by small groups of musicians or singers that are singled out because of their obvious talent. True worship is not led by a man, a woman, or group of people. True worship is only led by the Holy Spirit, directly (not through the mediatorship of a priest, a worship team or worship leader), but directly guiding the heart of each individual saint.

Paul confirms that this is the type of worship we should seek, in the book of Philippians. In Philippians 3:3 Paul says,

“For we are the true circumcision who worship in the Spirit of God

and rejoice in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.”

The flesh that Paul refers to is not evil flesh, but good flesh. Circumcision was from God and was good. The worship of the Temple was from God and was good. The worship created by King David, with the choirs of priests was given by God and was good. All the true worship of the Old Testament was through the flesh and was good. It was very physical or of the flesh in the good sense. There was incense for the physical sense of smell. There were vestments for the physical sense of sight. There was beautiful music for the physical sense of hearing. There was the meat of the sacrifice for the physical sense of taste, and there was the washing of water of the laver for the physical sense of touch. All these were fleshly or physical and yet were good. But as Paul says, we no longer put our trust in physical sense for worship. We no longer should seek for those things physical to aid our worship, for we now worship in spirit and by the Spirit of God.

We no longer offer physical incense to God, but now offer spiritual prayers as incense to God. We no longer don elaborate vestments, but now clothe ourselves in Christ Jesus. We no longer rely on beautiful music of others, whether they are marvelous choirs, or talented musicians, but now make beautiful music in our hearts, being filled with the Spirit, singing in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, to the Lord. We no longer eat the flesh of the sacrifice, but now spiritually eat and drink the flesh and blood of our precious Saviour. And, finally, we no longer wash ourselves with the physical water of a laver, but now wash ourselves in the blood of the lamb, and the water of the Word.

We put no confidence in those types of fleshly things now. The old covenant has passed away. We now worship in a new and living way, in a tabernacle more beautiful and magnificent than any earthly cathedral. We now worship in

the tabernacle made without hands in the heavenlies. And this is the new worship of the Holy Spirit of God that the Lord Jesus refers to in John 4:24.

True worship is now done by the Holy Spirit of God, but is that conclusive? Does that mean then that the Lord is speaking in John 4:24 only of the Holy Spirit? I would answer yes, except for one point. If John wanted to make sure that we understood that it was only the Holy Spirit he was talking about, he would have used the definite article to help clarify it for the reader, or he could have simply said the Holy Spirit, but he didn't. It says they that worship Him must worship Him "in Spirit" (not in "the" Spirit, or in the Holy Spirit, but, simply, in spirit) and truth.

Now, as we learned before, many times when a gospel writer does this and deletes the article, he's trying to make a point. When the article is included, the writer is always trying to point to the identity of a thing or person. When he leaves out the article in the Greek, he may be trying to point to the essence of that person or thing. So this is, I think, what the Lord is saying and what John is saying as he recorded it in his gospel – that God is Spirit (yes, capital "S" there, it's clearly referring to God). God in His essence is Spirit. Then, when he says, "they that worship him must worship him in spirit and truth," He is saying "they that worship Him must worship Him in all that is essentially spirit." In other words, in all that is "spirit" in a righteous sense, you must worship God the Father, and that is the true worshipers He seeks. So what does that mean?

How would this apply to us today? If we want to worship God in Spirit, we must worship in all that is essentially "spirit," which means first and primarily by the Holy Spirit of God, as Philippians 3:3 says. We must worship by the Holy Spirit of God, who has been poured out upon us and now is the Sovereign Guide of our meetings and our gatherings. This is the primary thought that I believe the Lord

is pointing to. But we must remember it also includes all that is “spirit.” It also means that we worship by our human spirit.

When we turn to the book of Hebrews, chapter 9, verse 14, it states,

“How much more will the blood of Christ who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience, from dead works to serve (or worship) the living God.”

It must be remembered that our conscience is part of our human spirit. Moreover, the word, which is translated “serve,” can also be translated worship as it is in Acts 24:14; Phil. 3:3; Heb. 10:2 (KJV). We do need to use our human spirit in our worship of God.

Now, what does that mean, to use your human spirit? It means that you worship God from the innermost, deepest part of your being. It means that when we come together and worship God, and we're singing a hymn of worship to God, we aren't thinking of what we're going to eat at lunch time. That is purely worship in the mind or in the soul. God demands our entire attention in the worship that springs from our very heart and flows out.

As Mary says in the Magnificent, (Luke 1:46-47) “My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God, my maker.” My “spirit has rejoiced,” you will notice in the English, is in the past tense. My “soul doth magnify,” you will notice is in the present tense. What does this show us? – That her worship or her song of praise began in her heart or spirit and it flowed out through her soul.

So there is an element where we need to worship God from our very heart, the deepest part of our being. Consequently, when we worship God in spirit, we worship first of all by the Holy Spirit, and we worship as the Holy Spirit leads within our heart—our spirit—and we respond back to the Lord from our spirit through our soul and with our

lips.

Then finally, I think, if we worship “in spirit,” it means that we have to worship by the Word of God. Why? – Because the Lord Jesus says that the words that He speaks are “spirit and life” (Jn. 6:63). And He says we must worship in spirit and truth. Truth refers to the Word of God. If we would worship God in spirit, we must worship under the sovereign leading of the Holy Spirit; we must worship from the very depths of our own spirit, our heart; and we must worship according to the Word of God. Those are the three things that God's Word tells us has the essential quality of “spirit” in a good sense.

It's used the same way in the book of Galatians when Paul tells us to walk by the Spirit. There's no definite article there. It means, walk by all that is essentially “spirit” in a good sense, which primarily means the Holy Spirit, as He leads us within our heart, i.e. in our own human spirit, and as we walk in accordance with God's Word. If one wants to walk or worship in spirit, one will need to learn to walk and worship by all three.

So the Lord is introducing a marvelous thing here. He's saying that a new type of worship is going to come. It is not the worship that has been done in this temple, or on that mountain, but it is the worship that He Himself is now demonstrating and that will one day come in the future.

The Lord, while on earth, did not use incense, vestments, or other physical things to aid His worship. No, He worshiped in spirit by the leading of the Spirit. His was a perfect worship, whether He was in Galilee, by the Jordon, or in the precincts of the Temple. He, with His human spirit, being led by the Holy Spirit, entered into the very presence of God His Father.²

² Of course, we are talking about His worship as the Son of Man, in “the days of His flesh” (see Heb. 5:7), wherein, not only did He pray

Therefore, the Lord, Himself, becomes the pattern for our worship. And on what basis did our Lord become our pattern? Let us turn to Genesis 22 to see. This is the story of the offering of Isaac.

In verses 1 and 2 of Chapter 22, it says, “Now it came about after these things that God tested Abraham and said to him, Abraham, and he said, ‘Here I am.’ He said, ‘take now your son, your only son whom you love, Isaac and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.’” And so Abraham responds to the revealed will of God, and he obeys.

Now let’s look at verse 4. “And on the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance, and Abraham said to the young men, stay here with the donkey and I and the lad will go over there and we will worship and return to you.” “We will worship and return to you” it says. Abraham considered that sacrifice that was to be done was an act of worship to God. We know that Isaac is a picture of Christ. So what we see is this—that Christ is a pattern of our worship because He, like Isaac (and indeed, unlike Isaac) did give His life as a ransom for many.

The Lord Jesus was the one that was sacrificed for us, and what I’m suggesting is that His sacrifice on the cross was the highest form of worship that could be done; His whole life on earth, as He was imbued with power of the Holy Spirit, became a pattern of how we should worship.

And how did that worship begin with the Lord Jesus?—The same way that it began with Abraham. God revealed His will to Abraham, and Abraham obeyed. God

unto His Father, but also, obviously He worshipped. In His Divine Nature, He always was in the presence of His Father in perfect communion, i.e. the bosom of the Father, being very God of very God, the Eternal Son of the Eternal Father, being eternally one with Him, i.e. eternally consubstantial with God the Father, along with the Blessed Holy Spirit (cf. John 1:18 and John 3:13 KJV).

revealed His will to God the Son, and God the Son obeyed. His whole life was a life of obedience to God the Father. It says that during His life, in Hebrews 5:7, that though He was a Son, He learned obedience through the things which He suffered.

In the garden of Gethsemane, when He was praying, the Lord says, "Not my will, but thy will be done." He, like Abraham, says "Yes, Father, I'll do thy will," and the Lord was sacrificed for us. That is the Lord's pattern of worship, and that should be the pattern for us.

First, we have to hear the call to worship. We have to hear the will of God. We as a local assembly need to understand that God has called us to gather together to worship Him, and He has given a pattern by which we may worship. And the beginning of that worship is sacrifice. Rom. 12:1 says,

"Therefore I urge you brethren by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice acceptable to God which is your spiritual service of worship."

What is the beginning of worship? What is the first thing we must do? We must all come to grips with Romans 12:1. As Abraham had to come to grips with God's call upon him to sacrifice his son, so we have to come to grips with God's call to us to sacrifice ourselves. If one has not dealt with Romans 12:1, one cannot fully (I am not saying never or partially) but one cannot fully worship God with the type of worship He desires.

If an assembly has not come to grips with Romans 12:1, it cannot fully worship the Lord, as He desires. We have to respond to the call of God, to the will of God. We need to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. It is a burnt offering. A burnt offering was burnt up completely. It is a total surrender and commitment of our life to the Lord.

Once we do that, and we obey the call of God, we then can go up to worship as Abraham and Isaac did. It is a worship that is pleasing to God because it is rooted in the pattern of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is based in sacrifice and obedience.

John 5: 19 tell us the Lord did nothing from Himself, but only what He saw the Father do. True worship begins with the Father, as it is expressed to the Son, and as it is made real to us by the leading of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. By that action, it then returns back by the Spirit, through the Son, and unto the Father.

Therefore, true worship is like a grand circle. It begins from the heart of the Father, flows through the expression of the Son, is made known to us by the leading of the Holy Spirit, returns through the mediatorship of the Lord Jesus Christ, and ends in the glory of the Father.

This is part of the purpose that the Lord desires for His Church. Remember the purpose of the Lord is that the nature and character of God should be expressed. And what is one aspect of the nature and character of God?—To be giving. God, the Father, is forever giving to the Son. The Spirit is ever searching the deep things of God, and through the Son, is affirming the image of the Father that is expressed in the Son. And as the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, all that the Father is, the deep things of God, are given back in affirmation by the Spirit to the Father within their own ontological and eternal existence.

The Father was ever giving to the Son and the Son and the Spirit were ever giving back to the Father. That is their nature and He tells us His purpose is that that nature may be expressed in us.

How is that expressed? – Through worship that is led by the Spirit of God. So, when the Lord says, that God is Spirit and they that must worship Him in spirit and truth, it means that worship has to begin with the Holy Spirit of God

as He moves within our spirits, and in response to that movement, we must be obedient and ready to give back to God by the sacrifice of our entire being to God.

Let's now turn our attention to the third aspect of true worship; worship that is done in accordance with the Word of God; worship that is prescribed by God, just as it was in the Old Testament—a worship that is not based on our own creativity, but a worship that is revealed by God for His Church—a worship that will give honour to the Blessed Trinity.

True worship in spirit and truth must also be according to the Word of God, for the Word of God is “spirit and life.” The Holy Spirit will never lead us contrary to the Word of God. And just as worship was prescribed in the Old Testament for Israel, so worship is prescribed in the New Testament for the Church.

Hebrews 9:1-5; 6-9a says this:

“Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary, for there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one in which were **the lampstand**, and the table and **the sacred bread**, this is called the holy place, behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the holy of holies, having a golden **altar of incense** and the ark of the covenant, covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded and the tablets of the covenant...Now when these things having been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the first tabernacle, performing the **divine worship**, but into the second, only the high priest enters once a year, not without taking blood which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the first tabernacle was still standing **which is a symbol for the present time.**”

Scripture tells us it was a symbol for the present time. God had a divine worship within the tabernacle and He says it

was a symbol for the present time.

You know the Lord was very precise in the Old Testament, as to how people should worship Him. They could not worship Him one hour with one type of worship and in the next hour with a different type of worship to their liking (as per the example we mentioned at the beginning of this booklet). When Moses received on the mount the instructions from the Lord, Moses was warned to be careful to follow the pattern. It says this in Hebrews 8:5.

“Who serve as a copy in the shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle: for, see, He says, that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you in the mount.”

That should cause us take pause and to take notice. God warned Moses to make sure you do it according to the pattern. *Christians need to realize it's not up to us to decide how we're going to worship God.* God has given us a pattern by which He is approached. We cannot decide – now we're going to have Traditional worship, and now we're going to have Contemporary worship. We are not told to create our own worship. Worship is not for our enjoyment, but for God's. Yes, when we worship aright, we receive joy too, but our concern should be for God's enjoyment, not our own.

Worship was always an important thing to God, and it had to be done according to His pattern. We have talked about Cain and Abel. Abel worshiped God according to the way it was revealed. Cain did not. Cain created his own worship (with good intentions) and God did not have favor for Cain's worship.

In Saul we have another example of one who was worshipping by what he thought would be pleasing to God, but soon found out it was not, because it was not according to what God had revealed (I Sam. 15:9-22).

Nadab and Abihu were ones who were careless in

their worship. It says that they came in and offered strange fire unto the Lord, not according to the way the Lord had prescribed. The Lord judged them and put them to death (Lev. 10: 1-3). Can you imagine that?

Why was the Lord such, with some things, in the Old Testament? When Moses struck the rock three times because of his anger, rather than once, He was told by God, “You can't go into the promised land.” Why did the Lord respond so strongly? – Because Moses destroyed the picture or symbol of Christ. He became presumptuous, not realizing (that by changing the manner that God prescribed) he changed the truth God was seeking to communicate. The whole Old Testament was to be a pattern and a picture of spiritual truths for the Church. That is why they had to be very careful to do it right.

We also have the story of David (II Sam. 6:2-16), when he wanted to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. He put it upon an ox cart to bring it up, and as they were going, it hit a little pothole. Someone raised his hand up to steady the Ark so it wouldn't fall to the ground. What happened to that person? He died immediately. Why? He touched it. Why was that wrong? – Because only the priests or Levites were to bear the Ark and they had two poles by which to do so. So, David was very upset, but I'm sure he went back to the Word of God and he found out that what he had done was wrong. He then went back and did it the right way and there was great rejoicing. As a name is important to the Lord, so the pattern is important to the Lord.

“See to it that you make it according to the pattern.”

As Israel had to be careful to worship God according to the pattern He revealed in the Old Testament, so too the Church must be careful to worship God according to the pattern revealed to us in the New Testament.

Now, let's go back to Chapter 9 of Hebrews. Verse 9a states, "Which is a symbol for the present time." In other words, within that holy place there were three things. It says there was the lampstand, the table of showbread, and the altar of incense. These three things were a symbol for the present time, according to Scripture. When the priests went in to worship, they performed the Divine worship, as the New American Standard says. They did it in connection with those three articles, those three furnishings: the altar of incense, the table of showbread, and the lampstand.

Now, let me ask, "when they would come into the holy place, would the priests first go in and take care of the lampstand, and then go and take care of the showbread, and then maybe burn some incense?" Or when they went in to perform the divine worship, would they first go to the table of showbread, and then maybe go to the altar of incense, and then to the lampstand? In what order would they perform that worship? As far as I can tell, this is the only verse in the entire Bible that tells us the order in which they performed the Divine Worship – 2 Chronicles 13:10-11,

"But as for us, the Lord is our God, and we have not forsaken him; and the sons of Aaron are ministering to the Lord as priests, and the Levites attend to their work; every morning and evening they burn to the Lord burnt offerings; and a **fragrant incense**, and the **showbread** is set on a clean table; and the **golden lampstand** with its lamps is ready to light every evening, for we keep charge of the Lord our God...."

They began with sacrifice – the burnt offering. In the same way, as we stated before, we must begin worship with sacrifice, as seen in Gen. 22, and in Romans 12:1. Then it says that they first went to the altar of incense, then they went to the table of showbread, and then they went to the lampstand. That is the order in which they performed the Divine worship.

Now why is that important? Well, back in Hebrews 9

it says that what was done then was a symbol for the “present time.” I Cor. 10: 11 tell us that whatever was written of old was written for our example “upon whom the end of the ages has come.” It wasn't happenchance the way God had things done. It wasn't happenchance the way the tabernacle was set up. Those things bespeak Christ. Nor was the order in which they performed the Divine service or worship happenchance. It was done in a certain order because it was a symbol for this present time – the Church Age.

In other words, there was a threefold act or aspect of that Divine worship shown forth by the altar of incense, the table of showbread, and the golden lampstand. Isn't that interesting? Why do we always find threes in the Bible? – Because it speaks the nature of God – and God's purpose is what? Simply stated, God's purpose is to express His nature and character. Even our worship is to be an expression of the nature and character of God. The Church is called, not only to express His life, *but also to express His nature in the way that we worship and gather together.*

Now, how do we see this carried over for the present time in the New Testament? Turn to the book of Acts 2:42. Now, here we also see an order. The order is in reverse because it is starting from the point of view of the apostles teaching on the day of Pentecost. It's starting from that point of view, but then it's looking back, like when we think of approaching God, we think first of, by the Holy Spirit, and then we think of, through the Son, and then we think, to the Father. The true order, however, of the Trinity is not the Holy Spirit, the Son and the Father, but is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So, with that context in mind, let's read Acts 2:42.

“And they persevered in the teaching and **fellowship** of the apostles, in **breaking of bread**, and **prayers**.” (Darby)

In the phrase “and prayers,” there is an article that is not translated in the English. It is a definite article. It should be translated, “and the prayers.” It is speaking of prayers done at a specific time.

Therefore, according to Darby’s translation, we see a threefold aspect. We see the teaching and fellowship of the apostles, we see the breaking of bread, and we see the prayers.

(Please notice Darby and, indeed, most translations – through the use of commas and prepositions– divide these things into three aspects not four. Now while it is possible to translate this verse in that way, I think if we look at the structure of the sentence very closely, we will find it very specifically shows us only three things without having to combine the teaching and fellowship together).

Young’s Literal Translation brings out this distinction. He was the compiler of Young’s Analytical Concordance. He translates it as follows –

“And they were continuing steadfastly in the teaching of the apostles, and **the fellowship**, and **the breaking of the bread**, and **the prayers**.”

One can see that the teaching is not combined with the fellowship in his translation. The threefold aspect in his translation is *fellowship, breaking of bread and the prayers*. He keeps them distinct from the teaching of the apostles.

Another translation that brings this out is the Philips Translation, which, perhaps, would be better known, not as a translation, but as a paraphrase. He tries to bring out the unique Greek structure also, by adding the verb “*joined*,” to the sentence (which shows why it is a paraphrase, since there is no such verb in the text). However, by doing this he emphasizes the two different thoughts in this verse. He translates it as follows –

“They continued steadily learning the teaching of the apostles, and joined in their fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer.”³

Here we see the threefold aspect clearly delineated, (even though he still indirectly links fellowship with the apostles by adding to the verse the word “*their*,” which is not found in the original Greek).

The teaching of the apostles should not be confused or joined to the threefold aspect of fellowship, breaking of bread, and the prayers.

How does Luke accomplish this? By using the Greek conjunction “δε” at the beginning of the sentence before the teaching of the apostles, and then switching to a different conjunction, “και” for the fellowship, breaking of bread, and the prayers. We do not see this distinction in the English, since most English translations translate both conjunctions by the same English word “and.” However, the conjunction “δε” has a broader scope in English than the conjunction “και.” In the KJV, δε is translated by the various English words such as: *but, and, now, then, also, yet, yea, so, moreover, nevertheless, for, and even.*

It can be used as a continuative conjunction or an adversative conjunction, but in the context of our verse in Acts it is used as a continuative conjunction. It shows us that verse 42 continues the thought of the previous verses. And, in order to clearly show this distinctive word used by Luke, perhaps, the English word “moreover” would be a better translation.

This continuation is also accomplished by Luke through his use of a periphrastic imperfect. The English words “they continued steadfastly” are actually a periphrastic imperfect in the Greek, which means it is a combination form

³ *The New Testament in Four Versions*, (Christianity Today, Inc., Washington DC, 1965) pg. 347

using a verb and participle. Literally it would be translated “they were adhering steadfastly.” Since it is an imperfect tense, it is telling us that it is referring to something that was already occurring in past time, and with a present participle, that it continues to occur in the present time, without any thought as to its completion.

Therefore, by using the periphrastic imperfect, Luke is connecting the “steadfast adherence” to an act that was already occurring in past time. In the context of the passage, this could only be the glad reception and adherence, of not only the teaching of Peter, but, apparently, also the teaching of the rest of the apostles that occurred prior to their baptism in verse 41.

We know that Peter spoke many other words to the people that we do not have recorded in Scripture (vs. 40). We also know that apparently the other apostles were teaching and bearing witness (see Acts 2:14 with verse 37 and 42). Therefore, the teaching of the apostles in verse 42 that “they adhered steadfastly” to, must refer to the teaching the new converts had just received on that day of Pentecost.

Therefore, through the use of the conjunction “δε” and the periphrastic imperfect, Luke is making a distinction between the “teaching of the apostles,” and the rest of the things listed in the verse.

Also, it should be noted the Greek does not contain the English preposition “in.” The teaching and the three other aspects are simply in the dative case that, perhaps, would be better understood by the use of the English word “to” (cf. Rom. 6:12; 8:12).⁴ The more precise English translation, therefore, would be as follows –

“Moreover (δε) they adhered steadfastly to the teaching of the

⁴ It seems the dative would be better understood as a dative of reference, rather than the locative.

apostles, and (καί) **to the fellowship**, and (καί) **to the breaking of bread**, and (καί) **to the prayers**.”

So we see from the sentence structure, the teaching in Acts 2:42 refers to the “public teaching” of the apostles that had just occurred, which became a common practice of the apostles among the people. We see this in Acts 5: 25-28 –

“Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are **standing in the temple, and teaching the people**. Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? And, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” KJV

Now, we are not denying that the Apostles also taught in the homes. We know this from Acts 5:42. But in the immediate context of Acts 2:42, the teaching, that was referenced, had to be the public teaching of the apostles.

Therefore the public teaching of verse 42 must be kept distinct from the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers, which were done in private. The teaching was public, but “the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers” were done in private during those early days of the Church. The former occurred in the public courts of the temple. The latter occurred in the private houses of Jerusalem.

We plainly see this in Acts 2:46 –

“And day by day, continuing steadfastly with one accord **in the temple**, and breaking bread **at home**, they took their food with gladness and singleness of heart.” (ASV)

In addition, another reason why the “teaching of the apostles” must be kept distinct from the rest is revealed to us

by Luke's use of the possessive genitive. The genitive "of the apostles" is construed with the dative "teaching" and not with the dative "fellowship" (as some English translations imply). This, again, shows us that Luke was making a distinction between the teaching and the "fellowship, breaking of bread, and the prayers."

The teaching belonged to the apostles, and so Luke writes the word "apostles" in the genitive case, but one could not equally say that the fellowship was exclusive to the apostles. It also included the fellowship of the original one hundred and twenty disciples (Acts 1:15). Nor, could one obviously say the breaking of bread belonged to the apostles. *It was the Lord's Table, not the Apostle's Table*, and, of course, Luke is not saying that the saints adhered to the prayers of the Apostles. Scripture does not tell us that the Apostles created liturgical prayers for use in the Church.

And so, we should realize Luke is *not* declaring to us that the saints continually adhered to the "fellowship of the apostles," or to the "breaking of bread of the apostles," or to "the prayers of the apostles."

The *fellowship*, the *breaking of bread*, and the *prayers* were not meant to be joined to the possessive genitive "apostles." Only the teaching was meant to be joined to the genitive apostles. He is clearly showing us that the teaching refers to what occurred in verse 41 and the verses before, while the "fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers" is referring to something quite distinct.

The actual Greek structure and order of words is: periphrastic *imperfect* (they adhered steadfastly), *dative* (to the teaching), *genitive* (of the apostles), and *dative* (to the fellowship), and *dative* (to the breaking [of bread]), and *dative* (to the prayers). In other words, the order is as follows: *periphrastic imperfect, dative, genitive—dative, dative, dative*. Most English translations incorrectly give the following structure and order by use of commas: *periphrastic imperfect,*

*dative, genitive, dative—dative, and dative.*⁵

So if the Holy Spirit made a distinction in this verse and separated out the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers as a threefold distinct occurrence from the public teaching of the apostles, what was the reason for this and what was He trying to teach us? Well, in order to answer this we need first to ask ourselves a question.

Generally speaking, when did the breaking of bread occur in the early Church? Now obviously, it was done daily as we read in the above verse, but generally speaking it was done on the first day of the week. It was the common practice of the Church to meet on the first day of the week to break

⁵ Please note, however, structure is not used the same way in Greek as it is in English. That is why it was mentioned before that the way most English translations translate this verse is a possible translation, however, that does not mean that structure and order have no place in the Greek language. It can influence the way the sentence should be understood, and that is why we believe there is a better way to translate this verse. According to Robertson (R. 502) the genitive usually follows and does not precede the substantive, so that if Luke wanted to say “the teaching and fellowship of the apostles,” the genitive would have then followed after the two substantives “teaching and fellowship.” The fact that he did not do so, but simply had it follow the one substantive “teaching,” gives us a clue that in his mind the two should be kept distinct. Now, it should also be stated that it is possible, in the Greek, to put the genitive before a substantive for emphasis, but, again, if that is what he wanted to do, then, more than likely it would have preceded both substantives and not just one. Then, perhaps, it would be more plausible to translate it “the teaching and fellowship of the apostles,” but the fact of the matter is, he did not use that order. Also, it could not be understood to mean that “they continued steadfastly in the teaching, and in the fellowship of the apostles,” for as we said before, the fellowship did not belong exclusively to the twelve but was the portion of all the original one hundred and twenty members. The Spirit fell upon all, not just the twelve.

bread (Acts 20:7). There is indication that at the very first, they might have done it daily (at least, in Jerusalem), but that did not negate the fact that especially on the first day of the week (because that was the day that the Lord rose from the dead) they broke bread.

If they broke bread on the first day of the week, when did they have the fellowship? – On the first day of the week. When did they have the prayers? – On the first day of the week. It was all done together as a whole. There was a threefold gathering of the Church. They gathered together for the prayers. They gathered together for the breaking of bread. They gathered together for the fellowship.⁶

And so, we see that the threefold gathering for worship of the Church had, as its parallel in the Old Testament, the Tabernacle of God. The altar of incense, where the incense ascended to God, was a symbol of prayers (cf. Rev. 5:8). The table of showbread, which bespeaks the Lord Jesus, was a symbol of the breaking of bread. And the lampstand, that gave light, was a symbol of the fellowship of the saints.

Perhaps, we should notice here, as was mentioned before, it is “the” fellowship, with a definite article. The word fellowship, as used in the New Testament, meant a communication of one’s own possessions with others. In the physical realm it meant the sharing of one’s material

⁶ It should also be mentioned, each of these datives in Acts 2:42 are preceded by a definite article. It is “the” prayers, “the” breaking of bread, and “the” fellowship. It is referring to definite aspects of the weekly gathering of the church. They were known as a specific portion or part of the gathering. That is one reason why it is so important to have breaking of bread every Sunday and not just once a month or once a quarter. It was always considered to be an important part of the weekly gathering. The same, of course, should be said of the prayers and the fellowship.

possessions (Rom. 15:26; II Cor. 8:4 and Heb. 13:16), and in the spiritual realm, it meant the sharing of one's own spiritual possessions. This could take the form of service, as is seen in Phil. 1:5, or it could take the form of sharing one's own faith and spiritual knowledge, as is seen in Philemon 1:6-7 (NASB). It was also seen as the sharing of—the one spiritual possession that all Christians had in common, albeit, in various numbers, combinations and/or manifestations—spiritual gifts.

We see this connection by first understanding the connection of the lampstand with fellowship. Light comes from God (Gen. 1:3) and, indeed, God is light and is called the Father of lights (Jam. 1:17). The Lord Jesus, of course, is the Light of the world (Jn. 8:12); and we are also called the light of the world (Matt. 5:14). Now, how can we, who were full of darkness (Eph. 5:8), be lights to the world? – Because we have been given the Holy Spirit and it is the Spirit of God that gives light, understanding, and wisdom (see Dan. 5:14 NKJV). Secondly we have been granted the Word of God which is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path (Ps. 119:105). God's Word gives light (Ps. 119:130) and, as we hold forth the Word of life, we give forth light (Phil.2:15-16). And finally, we are told that when we gather together as an assembly, we, as a lampstand, give forth light (Rev 1:20).

When we fellowship with one another in Church, gathering around God's Word, and when we minister to one another through the gifts of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit is giving light to all.

Now, how do we know this? – Because the spiritual gifts are called manifestations of the Spirit (I Cor. 12:7-11) and the root of the Greek word translated “manifestation” means, “to shine.” This is why it is so important to understand that we serve not by our natural talents, but by our spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are not natural talents. *Spiritual gifts will give forth spiritual light, for they are manifestations of the*

Holy Spirit of God, while natural talents are simply manifestations of our self and will not give forth the light which is life (Jn. 1:4). The light of the Holy Spirit, which is the same light as that of our Lord, will produce life. As such, He is called the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2), and it is only by such a life that we can be set free and grow to full spiritual maturity. Natural talents may produce Christian morality, but only spiritual gifts can produce a spiritual maturity, and when we fellowship with one another through the exercise of spiritual gifts, the Holy Spirit is giving forth light and life to all. And, of course, the same thought occurs when we fellowship in His Word – we are receiving both light and life (Prov. 6:23; Heb. 4:12).

The lampstand, therefore, foreshadowed the ministry aspect of the Church meeting (I Cor. 14), whereby we give forth and receive back, both life and light.⁷

So we see that in the Old Testament we have the altar of incense, the table of showbread, and the lampstand. In the New Testament, (of which it is a symbol), we have the prayers, we have the breaking of bread, and we have the fellowship. The order of worship that we have in the Tabernacle actually points to the present time and refers to the threefold gathering and worship of the Church.

Now, let us go on. We will see this order confirmed in Paul's epistles. Turn to the book of I Corinthians 11:1 NASB, Paul says,

“Be imitators of me, just as I am also of Christ. Now I praise you

⁷ It is also interesting to note that it was on the first day of the week when God said, “Let there be light!” (Gen. 1:3). Consequently, it is also on the first day of the week when God calls the church to a fellowship that gives light! How wonderful, that the fellowship of the church, which gives light on the first day of the week in the *new creation*, is foreshadowed by God's command for light to shine forth on the first day of the week in the *old creation*!

because you remember me in everything, and hold firmly to the traditions just as I delivered them to you.”

Now, you may say, “Well, wait a minute; I thought you said traditions are wrong or bad.” Well, yes, traditions of men are wrong, but traditions of God are not wrong. These are the traditions Paul is speaking about. The traditions that Paul handed verbally or in writing to the saints are the traditions of God. Today we have them as the very Word of God. These are the traditions of God, and these are what we must follow and we must hold to firmly. The traditions of men invalidate the traditions of God, and we must not hold to them (Mark 7:5-13). We, like the Lord Jesus, should be opposed to man-made traditions, but we should embrace God’s traditions, which are now inscripturated in the completed Canon of God’s Word.

That is why Paul was praising the Church in Corinth. They were holding to the traditions of God, which he had delivered to them. They were not creating their own traditions, *or new ways of worship*, but were holding faithfully to the traditions of God. He was praising them that they were still practicing those traditions, but the way that they were practicing them had to be corrected.

So if I Cor. 11-14 contains the traditions of God that they were faithful in maintaining, but Paul simply had to correct the way in which they were practicing them, what was the order of the traditions and what was the first thing he had to correct in Chapter 11:2 down to verse 16? Prayer!

These verses refer to that first aspect of worship practiced by the Church. It is the aspect of prayer. He talks about correcting their prayers and prophesying. They were doing good, by first having prayers because that was part of the tradition that he had delivered. The Church gathered together first to pray (I Tim. 2:1), and that was good, but the way they were doing it was wrong. And so Paul corrects some

problems in the assembly. The men must be careful to pray and prophesy unto God with their heads uncovered and the sisters should do the same with their heads covered.

(It should be briefly noted that as this prophesying is done unto God in the context (vs. 13), this cannot be referring to the prophesying of chapter 14 where the sisters are enjoined to remain silent. There are three types of prophesying in Scripture. First, there is praise and thanksgiving to God (see I Chr. 25: 1-3; I Sam 10:5; Ex. 15: 20-21; Acts 2:11 cf. 2:17). Secondly, there is telling forth the future, and thirdly, there is speaking forth the mind of God on a particular issue unto God's people – what we might call preaching today).

(Now, obviously, God does not need to be told about the future, nor does He need someone to tell Him what His own mind is. Consequently, since the prayer and prophesying in I Cor. 11 is directed to God (vs.13), and not to man (unlike I Cor. 14:3 where prophesying is directed to man), it must refer to our prayers *and that aspect of prophesying we call thanksgiving* (as in I Chr. 25:1-3) – i.e. praise in prayer that is directed by the Holy Spirit unto God. This is the occupation of all the saints, men and women together, but it needed to be done in an orderly fashion. Therefore, Paul corrects some problems).

Then after that correction, Paul moves onto the Lord's Table. Isn't that interesting? At first, he corrects the prayers of the Church, now he is going to correct things in the breaking of bread meeting. Then after the breaking of bread meeting, he talks about the fellowship of the Church as seen in chapter 12-14.

Regarding fellowship, I Cor. 12:1 Paul states—

“Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware.”

And in I Cor. 14:1 he says –

“Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy.”

And in I Cor. 14:3 he says –

“But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation, and consolation.”

And we know that this type of edification (building) referred to in I Cor. 14:3, which comes from the exercise of spiritual gifts, results in increase, i.e. growth—life (cf. Eph. 4:16).

This now is the third type of prophesying, that is different from the first type of prophesying of chapter eleven, for this prophesying is directed *to men and not to God*, and so this is the aspect of the Church gathering where the Scripture asks the sisters to remain silent (14: 34-35).

And it should also be mentioned that this type of prophesying, which is the result of revelation (vs. 30), will obviously give forth light. We commonly call it today, the illumination of the Spirit.

Eph. 1:17-18 speaks of this truth –

“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.”

And in I Cor. 14:26 Paul tells us this,

“What is the outcome then brethren, when you assemble each one of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation, let all things be done for edification.”

And so, what does this type of meeting in I Cor. 14 correspond to? It corresponds to the fellowship aspect of Acts 2:42, which corresponds to the lampstand in the holy place which gives forth light.

Therefore, we see a broad threefold gathering or worship of the Church in the book of Corinthians. First, there are the prayers, then the breaking of bread, then the fellowship (i.e. ministry). All three aspects of their gathering together had to be corrected. It was good that they were gathering according to the pattern of God's Word. Yes, it was good that they held to the traditions of God, as the apostle taught them. It was good they were worshipping God in the prescribed way, maintaining the prescribed order. However, it was bad in the way in which they were doing it, so Paul wanted to correct them.

But why Three? Why not meet with a twofold manner of worship? Do you suppose there was a reason why the early Church met in this threefold way? Indeed, there was. The reason was because it revealed and brought honour to the Triune nature of God—the Triune Nature of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The prayers are first made by the Church to God the Father. We also see this in First Timothy. Paul tells his young co-worker:

“But in case I am delayed, I write so you will know how you ought to behave yourself in the house of God which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of all truth.” I Tim. 3:15

Paul is writing to Timothy so that he will know how he should act in the gathering together of the saints. He is telling Timothy, this is the way you should behave when the Church gathers together in assembly.

And in chapter 2:1-4, what is the very first thing he tells Timothy is important for the saints to remember when

they gather together in assembly? He says,

“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and *for* all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty, For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

The first thing that he wanted Timothy to do, and the first thing he wanted Timothy to remind the Church in Ephesus about, is that in their gathering they should conduct themselves first with prayer.

The *first thing* the Church is called to do when she gathers together on the Lord's Day is to offer supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings to God the Father.⁸

⁸ We realize some believe this is not referring to the first thing a church should do, but to the first exhortation Paul has for Timothy. This is accomplished in modern translations by joining “first of all” with the verb “I exhort.” However, older translations, like the King James Version join “first of all” with the verb “be made,” showing us that it is referring to the first thing the church is called do in its public worship. In the Greek the verb “I exhort” precedes “first of all,” and the verb “be made” actually immediately follows “first of all” and is not at the end of the sentence like the English shows. “First of all” can be joined to either verb. It is possible to understand it both ways. Older commentators see it joined with “be made,” and thus believe it refers to public worship. New commentators see it joined to “I exhort,” and so believe it refers to the first of Paul’s exhortation. According to Greek syntax it can be joined to either verb, and only Paul knows for sure which one he meant it to be joined with; but when it is understood within the greater context of God’s Word, we believe the King James Version translated it correctly, and that it refers to the first thing an assembly is called to when they gather together.

Nevertheless, if indeed, it refers to the first exhortation to Timothy, it is still interesting to note that the first thing Paul corrects

The emphasis is on the Father. Yes, the Son is involved and the Holy Spirit is involved. The next verse says there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, and Jude says that our prayers should be done in the Holy Spirit. One Person of the Godhead never acts without the other two, *but the main emphasis here is the Father*, because it is His desire that we pray because He loves the entire world, and it was He who *first* gave His Only-Begotten Son.

He wants the Church, when gathered together, to first pray for the salvation of all men. That is the first calling of the Church. We must be an assembly that gathers together first of all to pray for that which is on our Father's heart. Our first act of worship as an assembly should be to pray for a lost world. What greater love and sacrifice was there, than the Father giving us His Son? What tremendous love God must have for lost sinners. When we begin our worship with prayer for the lost, we are reflecting the very heart of God. We are acknowledging the great sacrifice the Father had to make in giving His Son. What a terrible thing it is to forget or to minimize that great sacrifice. God's love for sinners was so great that He was willing to even strike His own Son. Do we realize how hard that must have been? When we pray first for

is the prayer of the assembly, the same as he did with the church in Corinth. However, the correction is not in reference to the manner of praying (i.e. head coverings), but rather to the content of their praying. Apparently, some in Ephesus were becoming "politicized" in their thinking, (perhaps like the Zealots in Israel), and rather than praying for those in authority, they would rail against those in authority. Perhaps, it was the same spirit that Jude writes about in his epistle (Jude 8 NKJV). Paul reminds them of the true heart of the Father and that Jesus died for all, and, as thus, all should be prayed for with the love of God. Paul believed, that every ruler, no matter how evil, was set in place under the sovereign will of God (Rom. 13:1-5), and so should be honored, respected and prayed for.

sinners we are humbly acknowledging the Father's great sacrifice and love.

We stated before, that we were one through the name, which was given to us by the Lord Jesus – the name of the Father. We are all his children. Well, as children we should be like our Father. His desires should be our desires. The Father's desire is that we, as a Church, gather together for “the prayers” – prayers for those whom He loves, thanksgiving for His care and providence, and prayers for the needs of the assembly in order that we might lead a tranquil and peaceful life. *When we do that, we give honour primarily to the Father, and are showing forth His character.*

Then after the prayers, what comes? – The breaking of bread. Who is the one that primarily receives the honour in the breaking of bread? It is the *Son*. He says, “Do this in remembrance of Me.” Yes, the Father receives honour in the breaking of bread. Yes, the Holy Spirit receives honour in the breaking of bread. *But, the primary Person of the Blessed Trinity that receives honour is the Son Himself.* He says, “Do this in remembrance of Me.”

So the Church gathers together, secondly, to give honour to the Son. It is so important that the Church break bread every Sunday. Otherwise, the Son is not receiving His honour on the Lord's Day. The whole purpose of the Church is to give honour to the Son. How can we give honour to the Son, and then forget the whole meeting and gathering that He gave us to remember Him by? How can we give proper honour to the Son when we observe the Lord's Table at the end of a meeting once a month, or once a quarter, rather than every Lord's Day when the Church gathers together to worship? To break bread every Lord's Day is according to the tradition of God! It is the tradition Paul delivered to the Church in Corinth.

Therefore, we see the Church needs to gather together first to give honour to the Father, by praying for

those things which are close to His heart and the things we need as His children. Secondly, she needs to gather together to break bread so that she can remember her dear Saviour and give the honour to Him as the Saviour of all mankind.

Then finally, we gather for fellowship through the proper exercise of spiritual gifts. By that, who do we give honour to? Yes, we give honour to the Father because all things begin with the Father. Yes, we give honour to the Son because we are all members of His Body. *But, primarily in the fellowship meeting, we give honour to the Holy Spirit because we give him His rightful place among the assembly of the saints to manifest Himself through spiritual gifts, both in love and life.*

Look at I Corinthians 12:7:

“But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good, to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; and to another faith by the same Spirit; and to another gifts of healing by the same Spirit.”

Now look at verse 11:

“But the one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one, just as He wills.”

When we meet as an assembly for fellowship, and have a meeting with not just one minister doing all the work, but a meeting where all the saints are being encouraged to exercise their spiritual gifts, who are we honoring? – *The Holy Spirit*, and so the circle is completed.

This is the threefold worship of the Church. We gather together first to pray, and by that, we give honour to the Father. Secondly, we gather to break bread and by that, we give honour to the Son. And thirdly, we gather together to

fellowship by ministering to one another through the use of spiritual gifts and in that we give honour to the Holy Spirit.⁹

⁹ Perhaps it would be good to state here that even though the order of our gathering has been made evident in Scripture, we would be well guarded to not turn it into a legalism. We prefer exhortation, not a legalistic spirit. We walk by grace, not by law. Scripture does not give us a specific command to worship *in this order*. However, we should keep in mind that *example is a strong basis for practice*. We meet on Sundays because of the example of the early church. There is not a verse that gives a specific command for the church to meet on Sundays, but who can deny that there is ample evidence that it was the common practice of the early church; and since we are commanded to imitate the example of the apostles (I Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 4:9), we base our practice today on that example, and so meet on Sundays. In the same way, there is ample evidence that the church met in this threefold manner, and so should be the example for our practice. At the minimum, if one rejects the specific order of prayers, breaking of bread, and the fellowship, *one cannot reject the fact that each of those three aspects are present in the meetings of the early church*, (even if one prefers to observe it in a different order).

Nevertheless, we still believe that the order of prayer, breaking of bread, and the fellowship is given more than ample evidence in Scripture as being the order and practice of the early church. Consider, for instance, these other examples in Scripture, in addition to the ones we have already mentioned.

In I Thess. 5:16-21 we have a hint as to the order of worship or the gathering of the Thessalonian church in Paul's mind when he wrote these verses. First, he begins in verses 16-17 with prayer and prophesying. In the next verse (vs. 18) he gives us a hint about the breaking of bread for which we are commanded to give thanks. And, finally, in verses 19-21 he hints about the exercise of spiritual gifts within the fellowship portion of the meeting.

Also, if one looks at Heb. 10:19-25, we see first prayers hinted about in verses 19-22, whereby we approach to the throne of God the Father through the mediatorship of our High Priest. Next in order, we see the admonition to hold fast the confession of our hope

Therefore, the *true nature* of the Godhead – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is manifested and expressed in the threefold worship and gathering of the Church. And if it is done in love – (as he tells us in the middle of his corrections to the Corinthian Church, in chapter thirteen) – it, obviously, shows forth *His character*.

This is what God desires according to His Word – for His triune nature and character to be expressed by His Church upon this earth. His purpose, simply stated, is for His Trinitarian nature and divine character to be manifested every Lord’s Day by His Church upon this earth.

Perhaps God desires to re-illuminate today the threefold worship and gathering of the saints together in His Church. Of course, it does not mean those things can’t be done on other days, just as the early Church, in some cases, broke bread on other days (Acts 2:46). Obviously, on other days, they had fellowship (Acts 19:9). So too, obviously on other days, they had prayers (Acts 12:5). There is nothing wrong with mid-week prayer meetings, or Bible studies in homes. *However, that should never negate what the Word of God shows us is due to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit on the Lord’s Day.*

We should pray every day, but we should not do away with the most important time of prayer, the time when the Church gathers together in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Lord’s Day to worship and to bear witness to His nature. We may break bread on other days, but we should not

without wavering, which hints at the breaking of bread meeting where we are to hold fast to the hope of His coming by our shewing forth or proclaiming the Lord’s death till He come. And, finally, in verses 24-25 we have the fellowship shown forth through the mutual exhortation and edification of the saints in love.

So, one can see that the specific order of “the prayers, the breaking of bread, and the fellowship” is assuredly hinted at, if not made evident in many different places in Scripture.

do away with the most important time to break bread, the time when the Church gathers together in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Lord's Day to worship and to bear witness to His character.

In addition, we may have Bible Studies and fellowship during the week but we should not do away with the most important time of fellowship, the time when the Church gathers together in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Lord's Day to worship and to bear witness to His purpose and all that He is.

Dear brethren, this is no mere matter of personal preference. Paul tells us these injunctions of his are the commandments of the Lord. He admonishes us all to recognize this fact. At the close of this section of I Corinthians he writes –

“If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things I write to you are the Lord’s commandment.” I Cor. 14:
37

The Lord desires us to meet together in this threefold manner. He foreshadowed it for us in the Tabernacle and gave it to us as an example in the Book of Acts. This manner of Church gathering and worship is the “tradition of God” that we would be wise to follow (I Cor. 11:1). In fact, according to II Thess. 2:15, we are told to hold fast to this and to all “traditions of God.”

How sad it is that today, the “traditions of God” have been replaced with the “traditions of men.” Men have altered God’s prescribed ways and, in their place, have substituted their own ways.

Many Churches have taken away the prayers of the Church on the Lord’s Day, leaving only the mid-week prayer service. Many other Churches have relegated communion, or breaking of bread to once a month. And many other Churches

have done away with “the fellowship” altogether, relegating the ministry to one man only and completely ignoring the injunction of I Cor. 14:26 –

“Well, then, my brothers, whenever you meet let everyone be ready to contribute a psalm, a piece of teaching, a spiritual truth, or a ‘tongue’ with an interpreter...” Phillip’s Modern English (paraphrase)¹⁰

Because of this, how appropriate, today, is the warning of Paul in I Cor. 14: 37-38 –

“If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things I write to you are the Lord’s commandment. But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.”

In other words, if one does not understand the importance of these commandments of worship and gathering, that Paul makes known to the Church in Corinth, he or she cannot be a spiritual Christian. Even though such a one may claim to understand the will of God, such a one is, in reality, ignorant. And as such, Paul says, let such a one *be* ignorant!

Now, perhaps, we would never have the boldness or authority to say that, but God’s Word does. One might even think it a little harsh on the part of the apostle Paul to make that statement, but Paul understood the importance of these commandments. He understood the danger of presumption in altering the ways of God (Heb. 8:5). He understood the spiritual principle to “be careful” in the things of the Lord (Deut. 6:3, 25; 8:1; 11:32; 12:32; I Cor. 3:10 NASB). And, most importantly, he understood the danger of men pursuing that innate desire to worship God according to their *own desires and understanding*. These, indeed, are matters, most

¹⁰ *The New Testament in Four Versions*, (Christianity Today, Inc., Washington DC, 1965) pg. 537

important, to ponder.

O Lord, may Thy Church recognize Thy commandments given to us, as revealed to us in the book of Acts and in I Cor. 11-14. May we realize Thy Church is first called to gather together to pray in accordance with Thy Father's desire. May we see that we are called together to break bread the first day of every week in remembrance, dear Saviour, of You and Your manifold mercy and love. And may we all come to understand that Thy Church is called together to fellowship – to manifest those spiritual gifts granted to her under the direction and guidance of the Blessed Holy Spirit. Amen.

May this be our prayer – may all Churches gather together every Lord's Day in the name of our Lord Jesus to worship and give testimony to the *very nature and character of our Thrice Holy God. Amen.*

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Special thanks to my daughter Heather who helped in proof-reading, and correcting this manuscript. May the Lord richly bless her for her continued assistance.

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