

The Spiritual Dimension—Improving Worship and Discipleship in the Church

Most churches have a time each Sunday when all the church members meet together. The writer to the Hebrews encourages Christians not to give up doing this in order spur one another on towards love and good deeds (Hebrews 10.24-25). How can we best use this unique moment which we have as Christians, as the gathered church, in order to prepare ourselves to live for Christ in everything we do throughout the week, as the scattered church?

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I. Introduction

- a. The revitalisation flow chart summarises the spiritual health of the church in this way:
 - i. The centrality of the gospel
 - ii. Worshipping God with a sense of wonder, reverence and creativity in a way which is also accessible to non-Christians
 - iii. Earnest prayer
- b. How can we deepen our spiritual life, our relationship with God and our desire to live a holy and caring life?
- c. How can we keep Christ central in our thoughts and be a people “to the praise of his glorious grace” because “in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Eph. 1:6-7)
- d. What should we be doing when we meet together as a church?

II. Marvelling at All That the Lord Is and Does and Expressing Our Heart-felt Praise

- a. The gospel is the centre and should lead us to live each day *sub specie crucis* (in the light of the cross) and *sub specie aeternitatis* (in the light of eternity).
- b. To keep the gospel at the centre of our spiritual life, we have to fight against the twin dangers of
 - i. legalism (imposing certain ways of doing things)
 - ii. routine (always doing things in the same way).

III. Enabling Each Participant to Remember Who We Are and What Our True Identity Is

- a. Every week we have the opportunity to stop and consider our lives coram Deo, in the presence of God. We can remember eight magnificent things about being a Christian:
 - i. We have a new and lasting identity as a child of God
 - ii. We can accept that we have done wrong, be forgiven and avoid feeling we are victims
 - iii. We have become part of a community which is both world-wide and local
 - iv. We can regularly examine our lives without fear and allow God to change us
 - v. We know good and evil really exist so we can work for justice and mercy in this world
 - vi. We can live with contentment and thank God wholeheartedly
 - vii. We are not totally at a loss in the face of suffering
 - viii. We have confidence in the face of death

IV. Encouraging Each Other

- a. There are more than 20 “each others” in the New Testament. How can we really live this out in our local churches?

V. Preparing Us to Live as the “Scattered Church” Throughout the Rest of the Week

- a. Hebrews 10.23-25: we meet together to encourage each other to love and good works, in particular all through the week in our relational networks.
- b. What does this imply?
 - i. Practical teaching on discipleship in the widest sense, living as salt and light in the world
 - ii. Teaching on today’s issues in the light of the Bible to help us to dialogue with people around us leading to the Gospel.
 - iii. TTT “This time tomorrow” (Neil Hudson) and prayer for each other as we go back out into the world.

- c. Is it legitimate to do this each Sunday? What does the New Testament teach in fact about our “services”?
- d. Worship is an attitude, not just a thing we do at a certain time of the week.
 - i. Romans 12.1 “offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual (or reasonable) act of worship”
 - ii. Philippians 3.3 “we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh”
 - iii. Hebrews 12.28 “let us be thankful and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe”.
- e. The vocabulary used in the New Testament for the time when Christians gather is not “service” (which is just the literal translation of the Greek word for worship, *latreia*) but very ordinary words such as “meeting” or “when you come together” (Acts 20:7-8, 1 Cor. 11:17-18, 1 Cor. 14:23-26 and James 2:2)
- f. To communicate this to the church as a whole, the following acronym may prove useful: what are our **AIMS** when we meet together?
 - i. **Adoration**: worship, in amazement at God’s grace towards us
 - ii. **Issues**: Training disciples to live in today’s world
 - iii. **Mission**: Sending out the congregation as the scattered church
 - iv. **Scriptures**: Biblical teaching