

Why I Worship In A Church Of God

By U Thein Maung

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Foreword

Many of my Christian friends have asked me why I left the church, with which I and my parents before me were associated, to join a Church of God. My plain answer to them has invariably been: "Because I wanted to worship God in the way He lays down in His Word."

Some of my friends have called at my home to speak with me about it, and on occasions we have conversed together for hours. In the course of these conversations, I have found that many are sincere in their desire to know the truth of the Scriptures in matters relating to Christian worship, and for this reason I have written this booklet. I have endeavoured to set forth what I believe to be the will of God for believers today, and throughout I have desired to show that what I believe is based upon the Word of God.

In the Bible God has given clear instructions as to the place and the way in which He wants us to worship Him, and it behoves those who love Him to search the Scriptures to find out His desires. Our love to God will surely find expression in obedience to Him, even as the Lord Jesus said, "If ye love Me, ye will keep My commandments" (John 14. 15).

The first step then is to seek the truth for ourselves, finding out His commandments, and the second step, which perhaps is the more difficult, is to put into practice what we find to be true. This will probably cost us something, as it did in my case, but it will also earn for us the smile of God's approval. The Lord Jesus said, "Ye are My friends, if ye do the things which I command you" (John 15.14).

I am grateful to my friend U Po Aung, W.K.H., a leader among the Chin Baptists, and himself a man who loves the Scriptures, for requesting me to put into writing the reasons why I worship in a Church of God. But for his persuasion this booklet might never have been written. My sincere prayer is that the Holy Spirit of God may enlighten the hearts of all who, like myself, are desirous only of pleasing the Lord by careful obedience to every detail of His Word, and if He uses these pages to this end my desire will be fulfilled.

1) The Word Of God

Dear fellow Christian, let me at the outset state that I believe the Bible to be the Word of God, and that the sixty-six books of which it is comprised are the revelation to men of the Divine Mind. It is my conviction that the whole of the Scriptures are God-breathed, and that no part therefore is to be disregarded, or counted of less importance than other parts. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3. 16 A.V.).

"No prophecy' ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1.21).

To give but one reason for my belief, I would draw your attention to the Old Testament prophecies, especially those concerning the Lord Jesus, as the coming Messiah, beginning from Genesis 3. 15, which found their exact fulfilment when He came to earth to live and die. This proves beyond doubt that the Scriptures are inspired by the One who said,

"I am God, and there is none else; I am God. and there is none like Me; declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done" (Isaiah 46.9, 10).

The Lord Jesus Himself clearly believed in the Old Testament Scriptures, for on many occasions He quoted them, and to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus He said,

"O foolish men. and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken" (Luke 24.25).

To be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ it is essential to believe that the whole of the Bible is inspired of God, and what is written in these pages will be of interest only to those who share this conviction.

2) The Divine Pattern For Worship

The more I study the Bible, the more convinced I am that God has laid down the pattern of both the Place and the Way in which He wants us to worship Him.

Let us consider firstly the place.

The Place In Which God Desires His People To Worship Him

(a) In Old Testament Times

In Old Testament times God asked His People to build Him a house in which He might dwell among them. "Let them make Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25.8).

In this Tabernacle God dwelt among His people all the time they were journeying through the wilderness, and when they reached the land of Canaan, it was still the place where they gathered to worship Him. "Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest: but in the place which the LORD shall choose in one of thy tribes" (Deuteronomy 12.13, 14). "Unto the place which the LORD your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put His Name there, even unto His habitation shall we seek, and thither thou shalt come" (Deuteronomy 12.5).

A glance through the 12th chapter of Deuteronomy will impress the heart with the importance that God attached to this place where He had placed His Name. It was the only place where He would accept the worship of His people.

(b) In New Testament Times

The question arises, has this a bearing on our worship today? Yes, it has, because the Tabernacle of the Old Testament was only "a copy and shadow of the heavenly things" (Hebrews 8. 5), of "the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands" (Hebrews 9.11). In New Testament times God has His house on earth, although it is no longer made with material things. "The Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands" (Acts 17.24).

His house today is built of "living stones," those who have received eternal life from Christ, and who have come to Him in obedience to His Word to be built together with other believers to form a dwelling place for God. "If ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious: unto whom coming... ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house" (1 Peter 2.3, 4, 5) "In whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord" (Ephesians 2.21).

Considering these two Scriptures together, we can see that the house of God is comprised of believers, likened to "living stones" who are built together into "buildings," and these buildings, fitly framed together, form His house.

(c) Churches of God where God put His Name

These buildings, built up of "living stones," are local Churches of God, as Paul tells us. Writing to "the Church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Corinthians 1.2), he says, "Ye are God's building" (1 Corinthians 3.9).

The saints who were gathered in the Church of God in Corinth formed one of the buildings which made up the house of God, His dwelling place on earth. This is the place where God put His Name in New Testament times. It was in Churches of God that the early disciples were gathered, and God's Word has not changed from that day to this.

Is it not right to conclude that God would have His children gathered together in Churches of God today? I believe it is. We read of no other churches in the New Testament. The believers were gathered in the Church of God in their own town, and there they worshipped God. The Church of God was the place where God put His Name. It was of God. "Of God" shows its divine origin, ownership and character.

The expression "The Church of God" occurs eight times in the New Testament (Acts 20. 28; 1 Corinthians 1.2, 10.32, 11.22, 15.9; 2 Corinthians 1.1; Galatians 1.13; 1 Timothy 3.5). It follows that God will not put His Name to something which is not according to His will. His oft-repeated instruction to Moses regarding the Tabernacle and its furniture, "See that thou make them after their pattern, which hath been shewed thee in the mount" (Exodus 25.40), finds its answer in the New Testament in the words of Paul to Timothy, "Hold the pattern of sound words which thou hast heard from me" (2 Timothy 1.13)

(d) The divine pattern of the first church of God at Jerusalem

The first "Church of God" was in Jerusalem (Acts 8.1, 3; 1 Corinthians 15.9; Galatians 1.13) and the pattern upon which the disciples were gathered is clearly laid out in Acts 2.41, 42: "They then that received his word were baptised: and there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship. in the breaking of bread and the prayers."

Seven points are given here, and each is important, and also the order in which they were observed. Let us note them briefly:

1. They received his word. The word that Peter preached in the power of the Holy Spirit reached their hearts, and they were born again. Then they were
2. Baptised. That is baptism by immersion, as such scriptures as Acts 8. 36-38 and Romans 6.3,4 make abundantly clear. Sprinkling is not once referred to in the Scriptures, nor the baptism of infants. After baptism they were
3. Added to the company already together in Jerusalem. This company is referred to in Acts 1.15. Having been added they became part of the Church of God in Jerusalem. It was not merely that they attended services there, but the Church in Jerusalem was comprised of these believers. Thereafter they continued steadfastly in
4. The Apostles' Teaching. All that the apostles taught was counted of equal authority with the words of the Lord Jesus. Matthew 10.40 shows that this was according to the word of the Lord Jesus.

5. The Fellowship. which is again referred to in I Corinthians 1.9 as "the Fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord." Into this Fellowship the saints in the Church of God in Corinth had been called by a faithful God.

6. The Breaking of Bread. This was the weekly remembrance of the Lord Jesus in obedience to His word in Luke 22.19.

7. The Prayers refers to the Prayers of the Church, an example of which is given in Acts 12.5, "Prayer was made earnestly of the church unto God for him" (i.e. for Peter in prison).

All other churches of God in New Testament times were one in doctrine and practice with the first church of God in Jerusalem.

Surely there is a clear pattern here, and such scriptures as I Thessalonians 2.14; Acts 16.4, 5 and 1 Corinthians 11.2 show that all other Churches of God in New Testament times followed the pattern of the Church in Jerusalem. Thus they were one in doctrine and practice. Together they formed one thing for God and thus gave expression to the desire of the Lord Jesus, "That they may all be one" (John 17.21).

The Way In Which God Desires His People To Worship Him

Let us now consider the Way in which God desires us to worship Him.

In Spirit and Truth

The Lord Jesus said, "The true worshippers shall worship' the Father in spirit and truth: for such doth the Father seek to be His worshippers. God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4.23, 24).

The question arises, what is meant by worshipping God in spirit and truth?

In Old Testament times the worship of God centred around a material altar, in a house which was built of such material things as wood, stone, gold and silver. Various animals were offered upon Israel's altar in sacrifice, in obedience to God's Word.

Today we "worship by' the Spirit of God" (Philippians 3.3). As living stones, we are "Built up a spiritual house. . . to offer up spiritual sacrifices" (1 Peter 2, 5).

We are a spiritual people, indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God (I Corinthians 6.19; Romans 8.9 - 15.' 1 John 2.27 and Galatians 4.6) and our worship therefore is a spiritual worship. It must be in spirit and truth. What is meant by truth? "Thy Word is truth" (John 17.17). "All Thy' commandments are truth" (Psalm 119. 151).

(b) In vain do men worship God if they teach as their doctrines human precepts and traditions

In Matthew 15.6 - 9 and Mark 7.5 - 9 the Lord Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and scribes when they found fault with the disciples for eating bread with unwashed hands.

Quoting from Isaiah, He said: "This people honoureth Me with their lip's, But their

heart is far from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men.

He then added: "Full well do ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your tradition" (Mark 7.9). The all-important commandments of God had been set aside and the precepts and traditions of men had taken their place.

(c) In strict accordance with His Word

Peter saw the danger of this happening again, and the purpose of his second epistle was to "Stir up your sincere mind by putting you in remembrance; that ye should remember the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and the commandment of the Lord and Saviour through your apostles" (2 Peter 3.1, 2).

From these above quoted passages of Scripture I believe that God expects us to worship Him in strict accordance with His Word, and this is what we seek to do in the Churches of God. We gather according to the pattern laid down in the New Testament, following the commandments of the Lord Jesus, which He has given us through the apostles.

Are These Scriptural And According To The Pattern Of God's Word?

To make myself absolutely clear, I would like to enumerate some of the practices which are contrary to the Word of God. I might add that these were matters which exercised my heart over many years, for as I studied my Bible I could clearly see that we were holding on to traditions which were not supported by Scripture, and these traditions were taking the place of the Word of God.

For instance:

(a) Men cover and woman unveil their heads

Men cover and women unveil their heads notwithstanding:

Firstly, the teaching of the apostle is to the contrary in 1 Corinthians 11:3 - 14.

"Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head" (i.e. Christ). "But every woman praying or prophesying with her head unveiled dishonoureth her head" (i.e. the man) (1 Corinthians 11:4, 5).

Secondly, that we are assured by the apostle's word that this is the commandment of the Lord. - "Take knowledge of the things which I write unto you. that they are the commandment of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 14.37).

Thirdly, the Epistle to the Corinthians is addressed not only to the saints in Corinth, but also to - "All that call upon His Name in every place. their Lord and ours" (1 Corinthians 1:2).

Fourthly, Dr. Helen Barrett Montgomery in her Centenary Translation of the New Testament, published by the American Baptist Publication Society, Philadelphia, in a marginal reference to I Corinthians 11.4, states: "The Jewish tradition required a man to be veiled during worship." The Spirit of God, through Paul, reverses this tradition. Should we not therefore be willing to allow our national traditions to give place to the Word of the Lord?

(b) Women do not keep silence in the church

Despite the clear command of the Lord in two places:

(i) Let the women keep silence in the churches" (1 Corinthians 14:34).

(ii) "But I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness" (1 Timothy 2.12)

On what grounds can the women occupy the pulpit of the churches in the light of these scriptures

(c) One Ordained Pastor in each church

In the New Testament Scriptures, pastors (Ephesians 4.11), bishops (I Timothy 3.2; Titus 1.7), overseers (Acts 20.28, margin). the presbyters (Acts 20. 17, margin), all refer to the same men. These are the men who are made elders by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20.28), and who have the care of the Church of God in their locality. They are the shepherds of the flock (1 Peter 5.1, 2). The Scriptures clearly teach that there should be a plurality of elders or pastors in each Church, as Acts 14.23, 20.17; Titus 1.5, and James 5.14 show. Nowhere in the Scriptures do we read of one ordained man having charge

(d) One Man Ministry

This is also contrary to the Scriptures, for I Corinthians 14 lays down a principle in this connexion.

(i) "Let the prophets speak by two or three, and let the others discern"(v.29)

(ii) "For ye all can prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted" (v.31).

All born-again ones have been gifted by the ascended Christ, and these gifts are intended to be used within the church,

"For the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the Body' of Christ" (Ephesians 4.12).

(e) The Title Reverend

Holy and reverend is his Name" (Psalm 111.9).

Dr. Young in his Concordance explains the word "reverend" (Hebrew yare) as "to be feared, revered." Surely this is a title reserved for God only. We do not read in the Scriptures of the Reverend Paul, or the Most Reverend Simon Peter, or the Right Reverend James. Rather Peter describes himself as "a fellow-elder"(1 Peter 5. 1) and Paul and his companions as "your servants, for Jesus' sake"(2 Corinthians 4:5).

(f) The belief that an "Ordained" Pastor is needed in baptism of disciples

This belief is unscriptural.

"Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations. Baptising them into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you" (Matthew 28:19, 20).

These instructions were given to "the eleven disciples" in Matthew 28:16. We believe it still belongs to disciples of the Lord to (i) go, and (ii) make other disciples, and (iii) baptize them, and (iv), teach them in obedience to the Lord's command. It is evident that the apostle Paul left the work of baptizing to other men, for in 1 Corinthians 1.14-16 he writes:

"I thank God that I baptized none of you, save Crispus and Gaius; lest any man should say that ye were baptised into my name. And I baptised also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptised any other."

Baptism is by the immersion or dipping of disciples in water.

(g) The Lord's Supper held once a month, or once a year, etc.

The holding of the Lord's Supper once a month, or once a year, is not taught in the Scriptures. "Troas... where we tarried seven days. And upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread" (Acts 20:6,7). The apostle Paul was in Troas for seven days only, and it is obvious from the reading of this scripture that it was the custom of the disciples to break bread on the first day of each week.

This is the day of the Lord's resurrection, and the day on which we are privileged to gather together to break the bread in remembrance of the Lord Jesus. Where is the scriptural authority for those who hold the Lord's Supper once a month, or once a year? or on a day other than the first day of the week? or in a place other than where the church meets? It is clear from the Scriptures in Acts 2:42, 20:6,7 and 1 Corinthians 11:22 that the breaking of the bread was made in the Churches of God and nowhere else

(h) The belief that an "Ordained" Pastor is needed to conduct the Lord's Remembrance

This belief is unscriptural. The command to keep the Remembrance of the Lord Jesus in the breaking of bread was given to His disciples. "This do in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22.19) were among His last words before He died, and the obeying of them is therefore very precious to all who love him.

It was one of the things in which the first Church of God in Jerusalem continued steadfastly. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42).

The Scriptures do not teach that the carrying out of this ordinance depends upon one of the so-called ordained pastors of a church being present. We believe that any of the brethren, led of the Holy Spirit, is at liberty to rise and give thanks for the emblems, and then dispense them to those gathered. Does not the following Scripture teach that the one who so acts does so on behalf of all? "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ?" (1 Corinthians 10:16).

Closing Remarks

These are but a few of the more obvious points which come to mind, and in writing about them I would like to Stress the fact that it is not out of any unkind feeling toward my Christian friends. On the contrary, it is with a desire to be able to help them towards a clearer understanding of the Lord's will that I have set myself this task.

Many know that for many years I had been exercised to find a company of Christians who were gathered according to the pattern which I saw in the Scriptures, and when I found such a company in the Church of God in Insein I had no doubt that the Lord was calling me and my help-meet out from my previous association, and adding us to this Church.

It is the Lord who adds to a Church of God as Acts 2.47 shows.

It was only after much prayer and careful consideration that I took this step, but when on December 8, 1957, I joined for the first occasion in the breaking of bread with the disciples in the Church of God I realized that at last I was worshipping God in the way which He has laid down. To be able to do the will of God in this way meant that I must separate myself from all other denominations. I remembered that Solomon says, "Buy the truth, and sell it not," (Proverbs 23.23), and this was the price that I had to pay for the truth.

However, this has been the price of truth down through the centuries, and whenever fresh truth has been discovered men have paid for it by separating to do it.

When I recalled that Dr. Adoniram Judson, who first brought the Gospel to Burma in 1813, left his home in America as a Congregationalist, and seeing the truth of baptism by immersion, separated himself to become a Baptist, I felt that my many Christian friends would understand my action. I would like to make it clear that I love them all, as ever I did. They are my brethren and sisters in Christ, those for whom Christ has died. Of the Church (Matthew 16.18) which is His Body (I Corinthians 12. 12, 13; Ephesians 1. 23, 4.4) we are fellow-members, and destined to share His Home together for all eternity. How could I then have anything but feelings of love towards them?

My separation has been not so much from them, as from the doctrines which they hold, and this step I have taken only because my first allegiance belongs to my risen Lord who died to save me. If I really believe that He died for me, then surely the response of my heart should be to seek out His Word diligently and obey it implicitly. God helping me, this is what I seek to do, and if any of my Christian friends have a similar exercise, then I pray that their experience may be that of the Psalmist's, who said:

"I thought on my ways. And turned my feet unto Thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not, To observe Thy commandments" (Psalm 119.59, 60).