

Three Hallmarks of a Biblical Church Member (Part 1)

Selected Scriptures

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It was in the 12th century that an organization was founded in London. That organization was called The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths. It received a royal charter in the year 1327, and for hundreds of years thereafter it became known as The Goldsmiths' Hall. The same organization still exists today, although not by the same name. Its offices are still on the same piece of ground that is occupied since the year 1339 there in London. This organization has one responsibility; and that is to test the purity of precious metals such as gold, silver, and platinum. And if a piece of metal passes the test and meets the standard for purity, then it is stamped with the official symbol of this organization. And that official stamp is called a "hallmark." It's actually where our word "hallmark" comes from. When The Goldsmiths' Hall put its mark to indicate that a piece of metal had passed the test for genuineness, it received the hallmark. Eventually of course, the word came to be used for anything that was genuine; that met the standard of excellence for that which was true and genuine.

Back in 2011, I taught a series here at Countryside entitled "Five Hallmarks of a Biblical Church." That included such things as our motto "A High View of God, a High View of Scripture," as well as others.

This week and next I want to consider a complementary topic: Three Hallmarks of a Biblical Church Member. You know, we are all concerned about finding a Biblical church. I hope that's why you're here; you're searching for that and believe you found that here at Countryside, a Biblical Church. And that's right and as it should be. But the question is, now that you have found a Biblical church, are you a Biblical church member? Sadly many Christians have come from churches where they've never really been taught what it means to be a member of a church. Sad to say, I think most Christians think about church like they think about a restaurant. You choose the one you like based on your taste. You go there when you want to go there. You order what you want and what's going to meet your needs. And then you leave without any responsibility to the organization. That may be true of a restaurant, but that's not true of the church.

The New Testament compares the church to a human body; your body. And you are a member of that body with a function to fulfill; a role to perform. The church also is described as a family - we are. We're the family of God. It's a family you belong to. And just like with your own family that means you have obligations; both to the head of the family, the father; and to your brothers and sisters. So, understand this: your whole drive to find the Biblical church should be matched by an equally driven desire to be a Biblical church member.

There are three distinguishing hallmarks that show if any of us is in fact a genuinely Biblical member of the church to which we belong; three primary duties or priorities that come with belonging to a New Testament church. Many Christians, I'm afraid today, are not Biblical church members when they're measured against these prescribed priorities. What are they? There are three of them. You can do a lot of things in the church. You know our church, along with many others, has a whole laundry list of things you can be involved in. But in the end, there are three priorities that are at the very heart of what it means to belong to and be a Biblical member of a church. They are these. Let me give them to you, and then we'll look at them.

- 1) You must be engaged in corporate worship; exalting God with the church.
- 2) You must be involved in service, ministering to the church with the spiritual gift that God has given you.
- 3) You must be engaged in fellowship; that is loving and caring for the rest of the church.

Those are the biblical priorities of a church member, of anyone who belongs to the body of Christ. Now today, Lord willing, we'll consider the first of those. And then next week we'll consider the other two. So, let's look at them.

The first mark of a Biblical church member is that you are involved in corporate worship. That is exalting God with the church. Now let's begin with some definitions. A definition of corporate worship. First of all, what is worship? Our English word comes from an old Anglo-Saxon word "weorthscipe." Or to sort of modernize it, literally, "worth" (w-r-t-h); "worth-ship". It means to acknowledge the quality or condition of worth in God. It is to recognize the worthiness, dignity, and merit of God; and to pay Him the respect or homage that is therefore His right.

Ralph Martin in the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia defines worship this way. He says, “Worship is an exercise of the human spirit that is directed primarily to God; it is an enterprise undertaken not simply to satisfy our need or to make us feel better or to minister to our aesthetic taste or social well-being, but to express the worthiness of God Himself.” Let me boil that down and give you what I would say is a definition of worship. Worship is seeing and savoring the worthiness of God and responding as He deserves.

Now what is the key idea behind biblical worship? If you examine biblical revelation, you will discover that worship is always, without exception, a response to God and to His self-revelation. Martin Luther, the Reformer, put it this way (and I love this quote), “To know God is to worship Him.” You see, when people encounter the true God, they always worship. Even His enemies are forced to do so. There are countless biblical examples. I’ve just selected a couple to share with you. For example, Exodus 4:31 says that when the children of Israel heard that the Lord was concerned about them and that He had seen their affliction, then they bowed low and worshiped. So, when they heard about God’s compassion for them, what was their response? It was to worship. In 2 Chronicles 7:3 we read, “All the sons of Israel, seeing the fire come down and the glory of the Lord upon the house, bowed down on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave praise to the Lord, saying ‘Truly He is good, truly His steadfast love is everlasting.’” They saw a visible display of the glory of God, the Shekinah; and what was their response? They worshiped. They couldn’t help themselves. They were driven to it by God’s self-revelation. In Nehemiah 8:6 and 9:3 we see the people do the same thing in response to the Scripture. The Scriptures are read and what do they do when they see God on the pages of Scripture? They see His commands. They fall down and worship. You come to the New Testament; it’s no different. With our Lord in Matthew 14:33, what was the disciples’ response when Jesus walked to them on the water; and then as He gets in the boat, the wind dies to dead calm? How do they respond? They worshiped. In Matthew 28:9 they see Jesus after the resurrection. They see the glorified, risen Lord. And what do they do? They fall down and worshiped.

Wayne Grudem writes, “Worship is not something that is self-generated.” You see, you can’t work worship up. It’s not an emotion you work up. “Worship,” he says, “must rather be the outpouring of our hearts in response to a realization of who God is.” You see, the main thing

about worship that you need to understand is that it is theocentric; it is God-centered. Worship is our reasonable, normal response to a glimpse of the glory of the infinite being who is God. See God either in a visible display of His glory or in His Word, and what do you do? You worship. This, by the way, is why The Word factors so prominently in our worship. Because emotion is not worship. Emotion is involved in worship but emotion is not worship. You can work emotion up. People do it all the time at ball games and other events. You want to see a really excited group? Go to a playoff game down in Cowboys Stadium. You can work emotion up. But worship will only be as genuinely high as your knowledge of God is deep. They're tied together. It is a response to a glimpse of the glory of the infinite being of God. And it's only as you see Him that you will truly worship. You might be emotional without that, but you won't worship without that. So that's worship.

Let's go to the other word that we're looking at here; the word "corporate". What is "corporate worship?" Well, the word "corporate" simply means pertaining to a united group, a collective, or something joined. So corporate worship, then, is collective or joint worship. Or again, if I could give you a definition, I would say this, "It is an entire local church joining together in worship, in seeing, and savoring the worthiness of God and responding to Him as He deserves." Scripture is clear that worship can and must happen individually. If you're truly a believer, you don't just worship on Sunday. You worship throughout the week. We worship privately and individually. But Scripture is equally clear (this is really important) that all true worshipers will eventually engage in corporate worship. You can't be a true worshiper individually and not be a true worshiper corporately. It's impossible. Why is that? Well, that brings us to the next sort of unfolding truth we want to consider here, and that is the priority of corporate worship.

The priority of corporate worship. Now I had a number of reasons I was going to present to you today, but as often happens with my messages, a number of those reasons ended up on the cutting room floor because there just isn't enough time. I'm just going to give you two reasons for the priority of corporate worship. Number one: Our Lord's practice of weekly corporate worship. You really shouldn't need any more than this. And this really builds on another reason I had that I cut, and that is the Old Testament priority of worship at the weekly Sabbath. Because this is what our Lord did. This was the practice of His life.

A crucial part of Jesus' life and ministry was being in the synagogues, on the Sabbath, corporately worshipping with God's people. Let me show you this. There are many examples even in Luke's Gospel. But turn to Luke 4, and you can't miss it in Luke 4. Look at verse 14. "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district." Now verse 15 of Luke 4 explains the focus of Jesus' ministry. "He began teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all" (that is, all of those around Galilee who heard Him teach in the synagogues). Now in the next verse, He returns to His hometown and we get a little picture of what happened in all those synagogues when Jesus taught. Verse 16 says, "He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And" (don't miss this) "as was His custom" (this was Jesus' habit) "He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath." Why? For the corporate worship of God's people. And as a rabbi, it says "He stood up to read. He took the book of the prophet Isaiah that was handed to Him, opened the book, and found the place where it was written," of course, the prophecy about Himself. Notice verse 20 concludes, "He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. And the eyes of all the congregation were fixed on Him." And notice "He began to say to them" – that implies, by the way, that Luke didn't record the entire sermon. Jesus had more to say than is here. But notice what's happening. Here's an example of Jesus' ministry in the synagogue. He was there for the weekly worship of God's people, and in His hometown synagogue He did what was typically done in synagogues across the land. What He typically did, that is, He read the text and explained the text. Jesus was an expository preacher. Now after the people of Nazareth rejected Him, Jesus continued His ministry in the synagogues in Galilee. Look down at verse 31. "He came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And He was teaching them on the Sabbath" (again, at the synagogue). This was Jesus' regular practice. Verse 44: "He" kept on "preaching in the synagogues of Judea." Here's my point. If you examine the ministry of Jesus, you will find a pattern. Jesus often taught during the week. That's true, in fact, some of His most famous sermons were preached during the week from a boat on the Sea of Galilee; or at the temple; or in some other venue. He often did that. However, the primary focus of Jesus' ministry, week in and week out, was preaching in the synagogues on the Sabbath when the people of God came together for their corporate worship. Jesus, from the very beginning of His life, fulfilled the Old Testament by participating in the weekly corporate worship of God's people. That was His life.

That isn't enough. Let's go on to a second reason that this should be a priority for all of us, and it's incontrovertible. And that is the New Testament pattern of the church and its weekly corporate worship. You see, under the Mosaic covenant, the weekly day of worship was the Sabbath, or, that's just another word for "Saturday." That began to change, however, with the resurrection of our Lord. As you know, He was raised from the dead on the first day of the week; on Sunday. All four Gospels record that. But, do you remember what happened on the night of His resurrection, that very night? He went to the upper room where ten of the disciples were gathered. He appeared with them, and what did they do in response to the risen Christ on the first day of the week, His resurrection? They worshiped. They didn't see Him again until eight days later, on the next Sunday; again, the first day of the week. And what happens? Well, there eleven were gathered. Thomas was with them this time. And they ate together as disciples of Jesus and they worshiped. You see, a pattern was already beginning in the very earliest years of the church. The church, of course born at Pentecost, but even in anticipation of that, you see this pattern beginning. Just like the original disciples on the Sunday of the resurrection, the following Sunday, the disciples of Jesus as time went on began to gather on the day of His resurrection for weekly worship. Early in its history, the church began to worship on Sunday.

Turn with me to Acts 20:7. "On the first day of the week [Sunday], "when we" (now notice Luke wrote the book of Acts and sometimes he's there with them and sometimes he's not – he's with them here because he says "we") "were gathered together to break bread." You remember that description back from Acts 2 where the new church as it's formed, meets together and they break bread. They take the Lord's table. Here we're told this happened on the first day of the week. And not just to break bread, but there was a sermon. Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day. And he prolonged his message until midnight. In other words, long expository preaching is good. Sorry. But no, seriously, notice what he says, "On the first day of the week" the Christians in Troas "gathered together to break bread" and to hear a message. This event that's recorded here in verse 7 occurred in the late 50's A.D. And it is the first official New Testament record of Christians gathering for worship on Sunday. Undoubtedly it happened before, but this is the first recorded event. Now, Acts 20 is not a special event. It's not an anomaly just because the Apostle Paul was there. Turn over to 1 Corinthians 16. Paul is giving directions about giving in the church in Corinth; collecting money for the church that was in need. And in the context of that, he gives us some insight into the worship of the early church.

Notice 16:1. “Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week” (notice this – now we’re not talking on the first day of the week, but what? The first day of every week) “each one of you” (so every believer there in Corinth gathers on the first day of every week, and, in context they’re to put aside what they’ve saved for the offering to the church) “as he may prosper so that no collections be made when I come.” Notice the church gathered for worship, which included giving on the first day of every week. And this wasn’t just isolated to the church in Corinth. Notice verse 1. It also included the churches in Galatia, the churches Paul had planted all in the Galatian region. And this pattern didn’t happen just spontaneously. They didn’t just decide somebody just had a good idea. Notice it happened in response to the direction of the apostles. Verse 1, “Now concerning the collections for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do.” Obviously, he’s talking specifically about giving, but clearly the implication is that they also were given the direction to meet every week on the first day of the week. So as a result of the resurrection, the Sabbath, Saturday worship of God’s people, was specifically and officially set aside.

I don’t have time to take you to all the passages; just one key one. Just consider Colossians 2:16-17. There Paul says, “Therefore let no one judge you in regard to food and drink, or in regard to festivals or annual feasts, new moon celebrations, and the Sabbath Day.” Now I understand a lot of people say, “Well, that’s only talking about special Sabbath days. This isn’t setting aside the Sabbath concept.” Well, I challenge you to do this. Go to the Old Testament and look up every time those three expressions occur together – festivals, new moons, and Sabbath – and every time, without exception, those three expressions occur together. It’s talking about the weekly Sabbath. So, Paul says that has now been set aside. Why? Because he says in Colossians 2:17, those are mere shadows; the reality is come in Christ. So, the Sabbath was officially set aside and Sunday officially by apostolic direction became the day the church worshiped.

Turn over to Hebrews 10. The writer of Hebrews is summing up how we ought to respond; and here beginning in verse 19 he says, “Therefore brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus.” Since we’ve been saved by Christ, we can enter into God’s presence through Him. Verse 21, “and since He is our great high priest now,” and then he gives us three exhortations. Verse 22 is the first one, “Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full

assurance of faith.” Be assured that Christ gives you access to the Father. Secondly, in verse 23, he says persevere. “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.” Third exhortation comes in verse 24 and 25. Notice what he says. “And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day” (that is the day of His return) “drawing near.” Now, what he says is you and I as a result of the salvation we enjoy, as a result of the fact that Christ is our great High Priest, we are now (verse 24) to focus on our fellow Christians. Don’t be all self-consumed with your own individual salvation. He says as a result of what you enjoy, let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. And where does that best take place? In what context does that best take place? Verse 25, not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together. When the church assembles for corporate worship, that’s when we best stimulate one another to love and good deeds. By the way, “not forsaking” there in verse 25 doesn’t mean that you can never miss a single church service. The Greek word “forsaking” means, to abandon; to desert. Some of the Jewish people in the first century who professed faith in Christ were tempted to abandon that and go back to the temple worship. And the writer of Hebrews says “don’t abandon; don’t forsake the corporate assembly.” But he’s emphasizing its value; its importance in the Christian life and experience. It’s where we stimulate one another to love and good deeds. So, it doesn’t mean that you can never miss a service. Nor does it mean that you can be a CEO: a Christmas and Easter Only Christian. The Biblical command is weekly. Each week. Every week on the first day of the week. What that means is that weekly corporate worship is the consistent pattern of your Christian life and experience.

Turn over to Revelation 1. In verse 9 John gives us his circumstances in which he's writing this book. John was there because of his testimony for the Word of Christ on the island called Patmos. And notice what he says in verse 10, “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day.” By the time of the last living apostle, the apostle John, this is undoubtedly written near the very end of the first century, in the 90’s A.D.; he calls Sunday “the Lord’s Day.” Do you know what that means? The Day that belongs to the Lord. That’s what it means. It’s the Day that belongs to the Lord. Unlike with the Sabbath, the New Testament doesn’t prohibit us from doing other things on Sunday, the day prescribed for our worship. But that doesn’t mean that we can do whatever we want and ignore the corporate worship, because it is still first and foremost whose day? It’s

not your day. It's not the day for you to catch up on everything you want to do. It is first and foremost the Lord's Day. It belongs to Him. And your priority ought to be the corporate worship. So corporate worship, then, is a huge biblical priority.

Even knowing that, sometimes Christians are tempted to try to replace corporate worship with things that aren't really biblical substitutes for corporate worship; things like involvement in a parachurch ministry. Listen, those can benefit the church. I for many years worked at Grace to You, the parachurch ministry that tried to help church members grow in their involvement in the church. There's nothing wrong with them, but don't think for a moment it is a replacement for corporate worship in the church. Others do it with a home Bible study - you know, that's "my church." Or a Sunday School class - that's "my church." Or a radio, television, or internet preacher becomes "my church." A more recent substitute is streaming the services of a church. Now, don't misunderstand. Obviously, we stream our services. We think it's a really helpful tool if you're sick or a family member is sick and you can't come, or you're traveling and can't find a good church. Or, what a lot of people do is they'll use such tools to supplement what they're getting in their own church. They're part of a church, they're involved, but maybe they're not fed there the way they really need. Their souls are still hungry and so they supplement that. There's nothing wrong with that or other reasons to use such a resource. But understand this, streaming is not a substitute for the biblical requirement to meet with your church in corporate worship. You say, "Ok I get it, but why? Why is corporate worship so important?" It's because you and I are "part" (get that word), we are "part" of the family of God. Ephesians 2; we now belong to God's family. And to focus solely on my individual worship is to practically say this, "I am the only one of God's children that really matters to Him." In fact, it's to fail to love others as I love myself, and therefore, it is a failure to love God. Let me show you. I have a number of passages in my Bible or in my notes here that I could take you to but I'll just do one. Look at 1 John 4:19. John writes, "We love because God first loved us. If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar." Now watch the end of verse 20, "for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen." So, don't tell me you love God if you don't love His people. You don't love God. You love yourself. And verse 21 says, "And this commandment we have from Him: that the one who loves God should love his brother also." Listen, you don't love God if you show up here and you say, "Look, I'm here for what I can get like a restaurant. I chose to come when I chose to

come, and I'm ordering what I want to hear, and I get what I need, and then boom, I'm out of here. I don't really care about these people." Listen, you don't love God, because you can't love God without loving His people. It's impossible. So, it's obviously very, very important.

Now, let's look next at the elements of corporate worship. We've considered a definition of worship. We've considered its priority. What are the elements of corporate worship? We can only include in corporate worship the elements that Scripture actually prescribes. This grows out of the principle of "Sola Scriptura," Scripture alone; that the Bible is the ultimate authority for everything in our faith and in our practice. Now the Reformers agreed on this basic principle, but from there they disagreed.

The Lutherans and the Anglicans join with the Roman Catholics in embracing what is called The Normative Principle. The Normative Principle teaches this: whatever Scripture does not explicitly forbid is acceptable in worship. In other words, The Normative Principle asks this, "Does Scripture forbid this practice in worship?" And if I can't find a chapter and verse that says "it's wrong, don't do this," then it's okay to do it. The Reformed that grew out of The Reformation embraced the opposite position of The Normative Principle. And their position was called The Regulative Principle. And The Regulative Principle says that only that which Scripture explicitly prescribes is acceptable in the worship of God. John Calvin put it this way, "God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by His Word." So, if the Bible doesn't say "worship God like this," then it's wrong to do. This, by the way, was the prevailing opinion that grew out of the Bible scholars of the Reformation. In fact, the Westminster Confession representing the Presbyterian line of thinking, and the Second Baptist Confession of 1689 representing the Baptist line of thinking, both said exactly the same thing. Listen to what they write. "The acceptable way of worshiping the true God, is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshiped according to the imagination and devices of men" [and then here is the punch line] "or in any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture." That's it. You see, The Regulative Principle asks, "Where does Scripture command us to do this in worship?" And if you can't find the place in the New Testament where it says, "The church is to do this in worship," then don't do it. Only what Scripture prescribes is acceptable worship.

Hughes Old writes, “The basic acts of worship we perform because they are clearly commanded in Scripture. The ways and means of doing them we try to order according to Scriptural principles.” Now why are we so uptight about this? Because remember the Second Commandment. The Second Commandment warns us how unprescribed forms of worship soon become what? Idolatry. They become idolatry. Duncan writes, “The further we get away from God’s directions, the less we actually worship.” It may look like worship; it may smell like worship; it may be emotionally compelling; but the farther we get away from the Scripture and what it prescribes, the less we actually worship.

Therefore, here at Countryside, our worship includes only seven biblically mandated elements. This is what’s in our worship. This is why we do what we do, and why we only do this. Number one, we sing the Scripture. 1 Corinthians 14:15, Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16 - we choose to sing to God music that is rooted in the truth of God’s Word. Secondly, we pray the Scripture. 1 Timothy 2, Paul says when the church comes together, I want men to pray. There needs to be prayer in the church. Our prayers grow out of our response to Scripture just as my pastoral prayer did a few minutes ago as we read John 4. Thirdly, there’s the reading of the Scripture. First Timothy 4:13, which Paul says to Timothy “When the church comes together Timothy, I want you to give special attention to the reading of God’s Word.” That’s why Scripture reading is a part of our service. There’s the teaching of the Scripture. Also, in 1 Timothy 4:13 he says, “I want you to read the Scripture, then I want you to teach what you read, and then I want you to exhort with it. I want you to apply it.” So, what do you do? You read the Scripture; you explain the Scripture; you apply the Scripture. That’s what I’m up here to do. Read the Scripture; explain the Scripture; apply the Scripture; because that’s what Paul said we’re supposed to do when the church gathers. Second Timothy 4, of course, same point, preach the word. Fifthly, another element of our worship is giving freewill offerings. That’s the New Testament model, to see Scriptural worship supported here in this church and extended through evangelism around the world. You see this in 1 Corinthians 16, in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, and Philippians 4. And then the last two elements of our worship that are prescribed: see the truth acted out in two ceremonies. Number six, we practice the ordinance of baptism. Our Lord gave the church this command, The Great Commission in Matthew 28, “Go, make disciples and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and then teach them.” That shows it’s in the context of the church. And in Acts 2 you see this flesh out in the life of the early church. Acts

2:41, “those who received Peter’s word were baptized.” Acts 18:8, “many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and therefore being baptized.” Number seven, we practice the ordinance of the Lord’s table. First Corinthians 11:23 and following, Paul lays that down as a directive on all the churches to follow. Now, that’s why folks, we only do what we do. Because this is what the Scripture prescribes. These are the only proper legitimate seven elements of worship. That’s why you don’t see me every Sunday up here in a set of tights doing spirit dancing across this platform. For which you can be eternally grateful, I might add. But that’s why we don’t do it. Because it’s not prescribed in the New Testament for the church to do. These things are, and that’s why we do them. The fact that we do these things because they are divine directives does add a solemnity to what we do here on Sunday. We are doing what God commanded us to do. But it also adds great joy because we know that in doing these things, God is pleased. Because this is exactly what He’s commanded be done in the worship of Him. It honors Him.

Lastly, I want to consider the practice of corporate worship. We’ve discovered that attending the corporate worship must be a weekly priority for every true believer. You say, “Tom, I get it. I’m here.” Well, that invites the next question, and that is “what exactly are you supposed to do once you get here?” You see, it is not enough for your body to show up. That is not worship. The fact that you’re filling a seat here this morning doesn’t mean that you have worshiped God for one second. So, what does it require? Well, the practice of corporate worship requires two intentional commitments. For those who are truly God’s, number one, you must deliberately engage in individual worship from your heart. When you come together with the church for corporate worship, it starts with you. Because if each of us individually isn’t worshipping, then guess what? We’re not worshipping corporately. It has to start in the heart of every person. In John 4:24, a little farther in the passage we read this morning in our Scripture reading, Jesus defined true worship. Listen to what He said to the Samaritan woman. John 4:24, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and truth.” God is a Spirit. He is a spiritual being. God doesn’t have a body and that means that we must worship God in our own spirit, because He’s Spirit. Now obviously He adds “worship in truth.” That means worship according to His revelation of both who He is and how He is to be worshiped. But what is this worship in spirit? You see to be true worship, worship must flow from your soul. It doesn’t happen simply because your body is here. This is not a new requirement by the way. God has always

demanded this. Do you remember back in Deuteronomy, the great Shema? Deuteronomy 6:5, as he begins to frame up God's law, what does Moses say? "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is One. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, your mind, your soul." God is not happy when your body shows up. He's only happy if your soul is engaged. He's pleased if your mind and heart are engaged in worshiping Him. In Deuteronomy 26:16, Moses says, "You shall be careful to do what God commands". Doesn't end there though; listen to this: "You shall be careful to do what God commands with all your heart and with all your soul." It's only obedience when your heart and soul are engaged.

So maybe you're here this morning and you've been in worship but you haven't worshiped a single moment because your heart and soul have not been engaged in the worship of God. And by the way, this is how the faithful have always worshiped. Again, I have a list of references in my notes. Let me just give you one. Mary, Jesus' mother, Luke 1:46. Mary said, "My soul exalts the Lord". And verse 47, "and my spirit" (synonym for soul) "has rejoiced in God my Savior." That's how we're to worship. It comes from inside.

So, to worship in spirit means that when we gather for worship, you do two things, if I could put it this way. Number one, you make a conscious decision to worship. And number two, you make an ongoing effort to continue to engage in worship. You can't just decide before I come, "yeah I'm going to worship God this morning." At every moment you've got to be reminding yourself, what are you doing? You're worshiping the God who created you, who provides all things for you, who is your Redeemer, your Savior, your Friend. Your heart has to be engaged. And that has to be with all seven elements of worship. So, for example, when we sing together, you are to sing to God from your heart. That's more than just moving your lips. It means your heart is engaged. It means you are sincere and authentic. You really mean what you're singing to God. And you certainly aren't refusing to sing at all. You say, "well, I understand this." There are people who say to me, "You know, Tom, I don't sing because I can't sing." Well, neither can most pop musicians. But look at how far it's gotten them. Listen, God doesn't care about the quality of your voice. He cares about your heart. And countless times (I need to count them up sometime), dozens of times, the Bible commands believers to sing. So, if you're not singing and you're a professed follower of Jesus Christ, you're just being disobedient.

When we pray, we are to follow the one who is leading. This morning when I was praying a pastoral prayer, and when Dusty was praying earlier to introduce the service, you're to pray with the one leading in your heart. You're to talk in your heart to God, along with that person, either agreeing with what they say and expressing it to God, or even rewording it and reshaping it in your own way. When we read the Scriptures, you're to remind yourself, this is God's Word to me. When you hear the Word being taught as you are right now, you are to listen as if Christ Himself was teaching God's Word to you. That's what God has gifted me to do. Now, you don't listen to me like you listen to Christ. You accept every word He says. In my case, like the Bereans, you need to make sure what I'm saying is true to Scripture. But once you manifest the fact that it's true to Scripture, then you need to listen as if Christ Himself were teaching. And you need to submit to that truth. And you need to determine to be a doer and not a hearer only. Being engaged in spirit means that you give regularly from how God has prospered you; and you give cheerfully to the Lord from your means for the support of the ministry here, and the expansion of the ministry around the world. It means you obey Christ in getting baptized. And you support others who become baptized with your presence and with your encouragement. It means when we take the Lord's table, you engage your mind in confessing your sin and in remembering Jesus Christ and what He has done for us. You see, participating in corporate worship means that you engage in individual worship from your heart. But that's not all. It also demands, number two, that you deliberately join in corporate worship with, and for the benefit of, others. You understand that? It's not just individual. Worship has both a vertical focus, God; and it has a horizontal focus, the people sitting around you. Although worship is to be primarily focused on God, it is not exclusively focused on God. Worship with other believers, corporate worship, is actually a chance for you to be aware of, and to minister to the people around you.

Let me illustrate this with a couple of elements of worship. When we pray, corporately, when we gather and pray, we are to pray to God, of course. But isn't it interesting that in Matthew 6:9 and following is Jesus teaches us how we are to pray as His disciples? He doesn't say "me." He says "give" what? Us. It is deliberately corporate in its focus. And when we pray corporately, that's how we're to pray. We're to pray with others. And we're to pray for others.

Or take singing. Obviously, we are to sing to God. But we are to sing with others, and even for others. Do you know what? Did you know your singing is for the people around you as well as God? You say, “Is that Biblical?” It is, let me show you. Turn to Ephesians. Ephesians 5:19, Paul writes, I want you to speak to “one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” There’s the horizontal element of worship. You’re speaking to one another. Now here’s the vertical; verse 19, “singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.” You see, they’re both there. Same thing is true over in Colossians. Look at Colossians 3:16, the same double focus, “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you” (why are we speaking to one another? Well, here it is) “with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” Listen, as we sang together this morning, you were teaching. You were teaching what you believe, what you believe the Christian faith teaches, what you believe is true about God, what you affirm. We sang, “I believe!” You’re saying that to God and you’re saying it to all these people. “This is my confidence, this is my hope, this is what I affirm, and you should too.” And then he goes on in verse 16 to go to the vertical element, “singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” Both are true.

Occasionally I hear someone say, “You know, I just don’t like the music we sing in this church.” Almost always when I hear that it’s because of personal preference. And by the way, you need to know I hear it. Seth hears it from both sides of the aisle. You know, there’s some who say, “You know what? The music here is just too contemporary. The drums, the guitars, the song choice, all those contemporary - let’s just sing the old hymns.” Others say, “You know what, the music here is just too traditional. Really, do we have to sing those hymns?” Listen, learn in corporate worship to think of others. That’s the point here. There’s not only the vertical element of worship; there’s the horizontal element of worship. Learn to think about others. If you don’t like one selection, realize that the person next to you probably loves it; and he’s being taught and encouraged and strengthened in his or her faith. By the way, and this is just for free; let me just say, learn to appreciate the style you don’t like. Do you know why we sing old hymns and why we sing contemporary ones? Maybe your answer to that question is: to try to keep everybody happy. Absolutely not. We do it because that’s what the church has always done. Go back to the New Testament Church. What were they singing? They were singing psalms. The ones in your Bible. The oldest one of those was written 1400 years earlier by Moses by the time of the New Testament and most of them were written 1000 years before they lived. And, they were

also singing contemporary Christological Hymns. We have fragments of them in our New Testament. They were singing the old traditional and the contemporary. That's why we do what we do here at Countryside. That's what the church should do. Learn to appreciate the style you don't like. If you like contemporary, I get it; I like contemporary too. But realize that the church has a rich legacy of music. Learn to value it as your heritage. And if you like traditional, then remember that all of those songs you like were at one point contemporary. And guess what? The people living then who liked traditional didn't like them because they were contemporary. This same balance (by the way, sorry that was my little hobby horse) between the vertical and the horizontal exists in the other five elements of worship as well. Your worship should be offered to God, but it should be intentionally offered with others and for others.

So, let me ask you, are you a Biblical church member? Are you? You want to be in a Biblical church; are you a Biblical church member? Are you committed to the corporate worship? And when you come, do you deliberately engage in individual worship from your heart? And do you deliberately join in corporate worship with and for the benefit of others? If so, you get the hallmark. You get the stamp of divine approval. That is part of what it means to be a Biblical church member. If not, if you have to say, "You know what, Tom, some of what you talked about this morning, that's just not how I was brought along in the church, that's not what I've understood"; then ok, I get that, neither was I. But determine from this day forward to change. In fact, let me just encourage you to do this. Take the notes you took today, stick it in your Bible, and for the next two months on Saturday night or Sunday morning before you come, review it. And ask the Holy Spirit to make you a true worshiper with God's people.

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for the joy of corporate worship. Lord, we need it. It does stimulate us to love and good deeds. It encourages us. It lifts us up. It helps us encourage and teach one another; to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, and Father, ultimately, together collectively to worship You. Lord, all these things happen when we come together. May this be our heart individually and as a church. And Father, I pray for anyone here this morning who has not yet become a true worshiper of You. Help them to find, in Jesus Christ, the One who can quench their thirst and tune their heart to be true worshipers. Even today we pray, in Jesus' Name, Amen.