

**Hebrews 9:1-14**  
**(John 1:14-18)**  
**“Perfect Worship”**

**Introduction**

Two dangers related to our public worship face Christians in every age, dangers addressed by our author: The first relates to the place where we worship, and to the danger of an inordinate love of the majestic, that speaks exclusively of God’s glory and majesty, but not of the intimacy granted us through the gospel and the simplicity of new covenant worship. And, secondly, the service of worship taking place within the sanctuary of worship: the danger of an inordinate love of majestic liturgy that emphasizes God’s majestic holiness to the exclusion of his tender mercy and invitation through the gospel to intimate communion.

In our text, the author is addressing Jewish believers facing persecution for their faith in Jesus, tempted to turn back to Judaism, remembering and missing the majesty, the physical glory and grandeur of the Temple in Jerusalem with its rich worship and dramatic and bloody sacrificial system. Early Christian worship must have seemed too pedestrian, too much like the simple synagogue service, with no option of going up to the Temple with its architectural grandeur and liturgical beauty and drama. In the face of trouble, everything about their former way of life is becoming more attractive and tempting to them.

This past week I spent in Vietnam with a group of Vietnamese Christian leaders discussing the topic of worship, and while we had representatives of many different groups – Baptist, Pentecostal, Lutheran, Mennonite, and Methodist – we discovered very quickly that, while the styles of worship differed, the essential elements, what is often called “the ancient shape of the liturgy,” was followed by every group whether in church buildings or house churches, because it reflects the biblical pattern of worship.

The man who coordinates with this group is a member of a congregation in the Washington DC suburbs that several years ago left its denomination for the sake of the gospel and became part of a new movement. In the process of all this, they were sued by their denomination and lost their historic properties. They became a congregation of pilgrims, meeting in rented schools and making do each Sunday with whatever was available. Recently they were encouraged to pursue the issue to Supreme Court, and they may yet do so, but the Rector, who has served that congregation for many years, told my friend, “If we should get back the properties, we will certainly use them for the cause of Christ, but I hope we never go back. We have rediscovered what it means to be a pilgrim congregation.” However grateful we are for a lovely campus such as ours, we must never lose that crucial sense that our worship does not depend upon a particular place or a particular style of worship, but upon the presence of the Holy Spirit of God in the midst of his people.

## **Body**

### **1. Worship under the old covenant:**

The sanctuary: Every element in its design demonstrated the order of salvation, even the placement of the altar and the basin for washing in relation to the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. But every element also physically emphasized one's distance from a Holy God and was designed to separate sinners from God.

The service: If the design of the Temple emphasized one's distance from God physically, the service emphasized that distance spiritually. It involved washings that could not cleanse, meals that could not satisfy, and sacrifices that could not deal with sins committed intentionally.

### **2. Worship under the new covenant:**

The sanctuary: Our true gathering is not in the church building or home in which we meet, but rather the in very throne room of God. We are there in two senses: We are in Christ, who is enthroned in glory (Ephesians 2:6), and Christ is in us, both corporately and individually (1 Corinthians 3:16 & 6:19). As the author has already reminded us, "We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf" (6:19-20). So our building should reflect this new and living access and intimacy, and never seek to separate us physically from the good things of God.

The service: Every element emphasizes spiritually our access and intimacy with God and with each other through the finished work of Christ. Every element should declare and invite us into intimate friendship with God through union with Christ.

## **Conclusion**

What if Christ came to church today? But we believe that he is here. Then what does he think of our sanctuary and service? Do they faithfully display the truth of the gospel? Do they invite sinners into intimate relationship with a holy God? Do they display his mercy and grace? Do they call us to mission? What does Christ think as he moves among us, saving, helping, keeping, loving, calling us to follow him and to abide in him?

