

## To What Extent May Non-Christians Participate in True Worship or Our Sunday Service?

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### PREAMBLE

This matter arose recently and is worthy of consideration. A brother taught on Giving as a sub-topic of Church Finance in my congregation. I asked, “*We always ask non-Christians not to partake in the Lord’s Supper during our services, why don’t we equally discourage them from giving or participating in the collection for the saints?*” A non-satisfactory answer was contributed by another brother but the matter was deferred so that the worship may proceed.

Later, I raised the issue privately with some but it was again deferred as various reasons were quickly advocated why we should encourage non-Christians to give. These include:

1. We need to teach children to give so that they would contribute financially on their own when they eventually become Christians.
2. Are we going to reject their money? Let us encourage unbelievers in worship as they bring their wealth to serve God. Someone may visit and decide to donate huge sums to help us with our building projects, evangelism, etc. They should bring it in.
3. God recognized the giving of Cornelius to the church and sent an angel to him so that he might be preached to and get saved.
4. There is condition for communion in Acts 2:41-42 but there is none for giving.
5. If we follow what you say that means that they should not sing in the church too.
6. Are you saying that sinners should not be here; only Christians should come to the church?
7. You are bringing a strange doctrine that we have never heard before.

Upon deep reflection on the situation, I decided to study the scriptures and discovered that the real question to be addressed is TO WHAT EXTENT MAY A NON-CHRISTIAN PARTICIPATE IN TRUE WORSHIP?

In other words;

1. What can non-Christians do or not do during our service on the Lord’s Day?
2. What are those things that s/he may do at that time and be pleasing or acceptable to God?
3. What are their limitations in our fellowship and gathering?
4. What constraints are placed on such or on us in relating during worship?

### INTRODUCTION

It is widely understood and accepted within the brotherhood that:

- Christians are those who have been born of water and of Spirit into Christ’s kingdom. They heard and believed the gospel, repented of past sins, confessed Jesus as the Son of God and submitted to water baptism for the remission of their sins.
- The Lord himself adds such that are being saved unto His church. Thus Christians are found only in the Church of Christ, the Lord’s body.
- There is one body which excludes unsaved people and denominations. Christ’s church consists of true worshippers who (seek to) worship God sincerely and wholeheartedly according to his word of truth. Jesus is the chief shepherd and authority, not man.
- Full worship services of the church takes place on the first day of the week and involves teaching & preaching, giving, prayer, communion and singing.

Think carefully about the previous paragraph. I used “widely understood and accepted...” NOT “totally understood and accepted...” There may be no need for this lesson if the situation were otherwise. If at least we agree on the definition of Christians, then we may proceed.

Consequently, any worship service of the church is populated by Christians and possibly some non-Christians. For the sake of argument (based on responses to my initial question), these can be further classified into various categories as listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Classification of Worshippers That May Be Present At A Church Service

<b>Group</b>	<b>SN</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Description</b>
The Righteous	1	Christians	Baptized believers and members of the church of Christ
	2	Children	The under-aged (offspring and wards of Christians or Sinners), little ones who have not reached the age of accountability
Sinners or The Unrighteous / Wicked	1	Prospect	One who has indicated some interest in the gospel, is studying the Bible to comprehend or verify if our message is true and is a potential candidate for baptism
	2	Sectarian Believer	A visitor who belongs to a denominational church and is not yet a Prospect
	3	Unbeliever	One who does not profess Christ and has no affiliation with any church e.g. Atheists, Skeptics, Muslims, etc.
	4	Disfellowshipped member	One who has been put away from the church of Christ because of sin

Please note that children are welcomed by the Lord Jesus yet they are not Christians because they have not understood the gospel and can not decide to obey it. Sin is not counted against them because they do not know really God’s laws and the meaning of transgression; they can not be held accountable for their actions. We know also that they do not inherit sin. Children are innocent and acceptable to God - Matthew 18:3-6; 19: 13-15 (compare 2 Samuel 12:23 with Acts 13:36). It is only men and women who are baptized for the remission of sins and added to the Lord in the New Testament, never children – Acts 8:12; 2:47; 5:14

**A critical question looms: Are children members of the church?**

**Answer:** Children are special members because they are saved and granted automatic entrance into Christ’s kingdom. Don’t we usually number them separately whenever we take the attendance at our church services? Children have their own rights and privileges even in the church although there are natural limitations encumbering their participation in our activities. Children together with Christians constitute the Righteous. All others excluded from this group are Sinners or the Unrighteous. While the Lord knows them that are His and keeps the divine register (Hebrews 12:22-23) each local church congregation equally knows those that have placed membership with them, over whose souls they need to watch.

NEW TESTAMENT WORSHIP

Under Mosaic Law, the Jews were to worship God according to His commandments. Under that dispensation strangers (foreigners) were prohibited from participating in religious activities **unless such became circumcised and thus converted to Judaism** or became proselytes – Exodus 12:48-49. Even Israelites who were not from the consecrated tribe of Levi were restricted from certain rites / tasks.

We read of how the church started on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, latter verses state:

38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

40 And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

41 Then **they that gladly received his word were baptized**: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common;

45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved

***The above passage equally reveals the inspired acts of worship, namely;***

1. Teaching for edification of members and Preaching to outsiders (apostles' doctrine)
2. Prayers
3. Singing (praising God)
4. Lord's Supper or Communion (breaking of bread)
5. Giving, sharing and togetherness (fellowship)

Acts 2 shows that it is those who were BAPTIZED that continued steadfastly to render acceptable worship. That should not be surprising since baptism is a parallel to Old Testament circumcision to bring one into the family of God -Romans 2:28-29, Colossians 2:11, Philippians 3:3, John 3:3-5, Titus 3:4-5

We equally see *below* that a disfellowshipped brother / sister is no longer entitled to Christian privileges but should be isolated. Such can not worship acceptably and must repent in order to be restored. Like the prodigal son, such would be welcomed once s/he takes the necessary steps back into faith.

2 Thessalonians 3:6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.

1 Corinthians 5

11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.

12 For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?

13 But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.

**What does the New Testament say about participating in the acts of true worship?**

A) TEACHING/PREACHING

Please read Romans 1:16 -17, 1 Thessalonians 1:6-8 and Hebrews 5: 12-14 AND

1 Timothy 4:16 Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

2 Timothy 2:2 And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to **faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.**

2 Timothy 4:2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

1 Corinthians 14:3 But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.

24 But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all:

25 And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.

26 How is it then, **brethren?** *when ye come together, every one of you* hath a psalm, hath a doctrine,...

The above passages shows that only mature Christians should teach! Children are unlearned and are not yet part of the faithful brethren. Others are not yet saved and have not grasped the first principles of the doctrine of Christ while the disfellowshipped needs to repent to be readmitted to the midst of brethren who qualify to edify the congregation. Of course, the Unrighteous can observe and should be taught. They may ask questions and should be instructed on the path to salvation.

## B) PRAYERS

Matthew 6:9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name

Mark 11:17 And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer?

1 Timothy 3:15 But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

Acts 12:5 ¶Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.

Ephesians 6:18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;

1 Timothy 2:8 I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.

James 5:16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

John 9:31 Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth.

Surely, only God's true worshippers have full access to Him in prayer. Prior to his conversion, prayerful Cornelius was a worshiper but not in the Christian way. **Anyone may pray but for reasons highlighted in the verses above, Sinners can not lead prayers in the congregation of the Righteous.** A sinner's prayer would be abominable to the Lord unless such is penitent and seeking the way of salvation –Luke 18:13. After all, the sweet smelling odours before the Lamb's throne are "the prayers of the saints" –Rev 5:8b.

## C) SINGING

Matthew 21:15 And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased,

16 And said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?

Acts 2:47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

1 Corinthians 14:15 What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.

Ephesians 5:19 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Hebrews 2:12 Saying, I will declare thy name unto **my brethren**, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.

Hebrews 13:15 By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

1 Peter 2:5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:

From the underlined verses, the Unrighteous' singing during church worship is actually meaningless as such would approximate to a sacrifice of fools. Sinners are hardly ever asked to lead us in songs. It is the *brethren and children* that 'yourselves', 'one another' and '*called out*' refers to; being the ones offering spiritual sacrifices through Jesus.

#### D) LORD'S SUPPER

Matthew 26

26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.

27 And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;

28 For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

29 But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.

Acts 20:7 And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.

1 Corinthians 11

23 For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread:

24 And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.

25 After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.

26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

- 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.  
 29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.  
 30 For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.  
 31 For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.  
 32 But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.  
 33 Wherefore, **my brethren, when ye come together to eat**, tarry one for another.

The above passages shows that it is the BRETHREN (those for whom Christ died, people who are washed of their sins in His blood) that should partake of the communion. It is not for those who are still in the world nor could we eat with a disfellowshipped person. Evidently sinless Children and the Unrighteous do not qualify to partake. We equally do not assign such to officiate or to serve the communion.

#### E) GIVING

- 1 Corinthians 16:1 Now concerning **the collection for the saints**, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye.  
 2 Upon the first day of the week **let every one of you** lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.

2 Corinthians 8:4 Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

5 And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.

12 For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.

2 Corinthians 9:6 ¶But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.

7 Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.

These passages equally show once again that EVERYONE OF YOU refers to each member of the church especially those who have given their lives to Christ and are currently Saints not the Unrighteous. Indeed, personal prosperity and voluntarily setting aside beforehand further excludes **many** children who are usually given 'collection money' by their parents on Sunday mornings.

In response to the earlier stated claims why some want non-Christians to give, please note that:

- i. We are to teach others in word and by our OWN exemplary conduct not by requiring them to do something God has not authorized for them to do. It is this attitude of "trying to help God and children" that led to the unscriptural practice of infant baptism. In order to '*teach children to take the Lord's Supper when they grow up,*' should parents give them portions of their own piece of the bread and wine during communion? Let a child grow up to make his own choices; **don't impose what, when and how** he must give! There must first be a willing mind; according to what the child has from that set aside out of what God has prospered him (e.g. pocket money). Neither should we claim to teach a Sinner 'the concept of giving' in the church by extorting his money, let us teach him the gospel and rather collect his soul for Christ.

- ii. If one has not accepted Christ what makes you think that Christ would love to accept his gift or money? Many denominational preachers make excuses to justify receiving tithes while acknowledging that the Law of Moses on tithes is not fully applicable or strictly obeyed today. **Are we also becoming greedy for filthy lucre or do we doubt that God can gloriously supply our needs as a church?** Such attitude will lead to respect of persons within the assembly, cause the world to lose respect for the church and make them blaspheme our Lord -James 2:1-7, Hebrews 13:5-6.
- iii. Cornelius, a devout man gave alms to people NOT that he gave in the church –Acts 10:2. God saw his heart and drew him to Himself. Peter went to preach to his household and neither requested nor received gifts or money as far as divine records show. His message to the unsaved centered on salvation. Some today will contrive launching, distribution of envelopes to all and sundry, congregational levies, cajoling etc. to raise funds without scriptural authority. **Are you involved?**
- iv. **It is speculative to assume** that there is a pre-condition for communion with none for giving. Acts 2 shows that baptism is required for those that have come of age, for anyone to be added to the church before s/he can be a true worshipper today.
- v. We have shown that Sinners’ singing is an unacceptable sacrifice to God, **left to themselves**, what they often offer can hardly qualify as ‘spiritual or scriptural songs.’
- vi. Everyone is welcomed to come and learn of Christ - Matthew 11:28-29, John 6:45, Matthew 28:18-20, Corinthians 2:13. Today, it is the church that declares the manifold wisdom of God as it is the pillar and ground of the truth. **One of her core duties is evangelism to save souls, thus sinners are to be preached to at all times not mingled with as if we are same.**
- vii. If this is a strange doctrine then **all you need do is refute it with the New Testament and not set out a defense merely with sentiments, emotion and human wisdom.**

My appeal is that we be consistent in our teaching and practice of faith. It somehow smacks of hypocrisy to always discourage Sinners from dipping their hands into the Lord’s Table (to take) while we encourage them or turn a blind eye when the same hand is stretched towards the Lord’s Purse (to give). *Is this because the money will be used directly by us and not by the Lord?* Who is more blessed (Acts 20:35)?

Brethren, it is time to demonstrate godly courage and do the right thing during every worship service. While we may not cover the mouths of the Unrighteous to stop their singing nor bar their hands to prevent their dipping it in the communion plate or collection bag, nor stop them from asking questions during teaching, nor saying Amen to our prayers, **it behooves us to continually admonish that their worship is imperfect and unacceptable unless and until they become Christians.**

Olumuyiwa,

I think you bring up some interesting questions. However, I think you may need to consider some other questions before you can get to a final conclusion.

1. In your arguments you did not consistently make a distinction between those who lead and those who participate. For example, a public prayer is one person leading the group in prayer so that at the end all may give an "amen" (consent to the content) (1 Corinthians 14:16). One "leads", but all participate. While it might be easy to determine who is a good candidate to lead such a prayer, who can stop anyone in the audience from saying "amen"? Women as a class are excluded from leading in the services, but yet are required to participate. Therefore any scripture that shows special requirements for the leader can not be used as requirements for the participants.

2. You occasionally mix in your arguments the point of view of man and the point of view of God. For example, repentance is required for one to come to Christ. Someone comes forward to be baptized, but in his heart he has not repented. He is not accepted by God because God is able to judge the heart. However, we accept him as a brother because we saw him confess Christ and go through baptism. God correctly and unerringly determines who is in his kingdom. We are completely flawed and will accept people who are not in the kingdom and also because of our lack of knowledge or prejudices exclude those who are. Therefore, any scripture used that is from God's point of view has to be used with caution when trying to determine authority for who is or is not allowed to participate.

3. In order to be able to determine who may worship or not worship with you, you have to also have someone or a group of someones who will sit in judgment on the worthiness of the candidates. How do you make such a distinction? Do you grill each person with questions as they enter the service? What if they lie to you? Do you exclude everyone until you can determine that they are worthy to participate? What if you make a mistake and exclude those who were allowed to worship? What if, even after your best screening, you allowed someone in who should not have been in?

4. The real answer, though, to your question will come in realizing that it is not "our worship service", it is "the Lord's worship service". We do the best that we can to please God. We don't have to make any judgment on anyone else. Many places where I have been make it a practice before the Lord's Supper and the contribution to remind everyone what is being done. For the Lord's Supper we often go to 1 Corinthians 11 and point out that participation is a matter of reflecting on the Lord. Those not in the Lord will, if they are paying attention, not participate if they think they are "out". Those who do participate and who should not have, "sinned against the Lord". They did not sin against us. For the contribution, many men will say something like, "this is a privilege and an obligation of the members of the church here. We do not solicit money from anyone else." No one that I know tries to determine the worthiness of anyone who gives. If evil men give, we accept it in good conscience in the name of the Lord (1 Corinthians 10:23-30).

5. The Lord may not accept our contribution, even though we are Christians. Matthew 5:23-24 says that we need to reconcile our faults with those we have disputes before we finalize an offering to God. Implied there and stated elsewhere, is that if we do not reconcile, then our gift will not be accepted. How would anyone else know unless that person said something? Again, we accept everyone in good conscience. Anyway, these are things to think on.

Darrell Hamilton



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Bro. Darell,

thanks for your contribution. My hope is that we may study together to reach a conclusion.

My thesis is not that we sit in judgement to determine 'who is worthy' to participate or to screen worshippers. Rather, it is simply that we always remind those who are not right with God that their participation is imperfect until they do the right thing. It is the complacent mingling with non-christians and the reasons given for why they should be encouraged to partake in the collection for the saints that bothers me.

While it is true that 'the one leading' is different from 'participants,' I assume that any devoted male member may be called upon to lead in an activity. Long-standing, regularly worshipping non-christians/non-members have occasionally been given assignments in some congregations. My understanding is that the recurring phrase 'every one of you' refers to church members and does not include visiting unbelievers whether it is for communion or collection. I even discussed the limitations upon children in certain aspects.

It is surely the Lord's service and we are to render worship. Who ever fails to discern sins against God not man as you rightly pointed out. It would only be nice and morally right that we be consistent in our approach for admonishing the assembly. How I wish that brothers everywhere will say something like, "*this is a privilege and an obligation of the members of the church here. We do not solicit money from anyone else.*"

[Olumuyiwa ASAOLU](#)

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Hi, Brother Olumuyiwa and others on this e-mail list,

<This e-mail doesn't really pertain to the subject on question, but is is a thought I had based upon the discussion. Please feel free to toss this away if you'd like :-) >

It is great to discuss these matters, but, frankly, we don't have much in Scripture to answer the questions you raise about whether or not a non-believer can or should contribute money to the cause of Christ. This seems to be a matter where brethren at individual churches must work together to be on the same page.

It is dangerous to try to come to some "brotherhood-wide" position on this topic (or any other, for that matter). I believe great harm can come from well-meaning brethren who want to reach brotherhood-wide consensus on doctrinal issues because an invisible but nonetheless real banding together of churches begins to take place.

A couple of years ago, I read through an internet conversation where several brethren were saying, "We need to all agree on the name of the church." What church were they talking about? Does their image of Christ's body consist of a banding together of local assemblies of the Lord across the world? Really, they were upset about brethren who put forth a description of themselves on their signs and advertisements other than "Church of Christ." They thought this was terrible. They thought the next step should be brethren from all over the world getting together and deciding "Church of Christ" is THE name for "us." This would effectively exclude any brethren who believe or act differently and would create a denomination called "Church of Christ." They would have named themselves and started on their creed: Law #1: you must call yourself "Church of Christ." Law #2: You must be on the e-mail list under the watchful eye of the brotherhood watch-dogs. Etc.

I don't want to get too fired up about it, because I realize many of these brethren DO have great intentions and motivations. But well-intentioned brethren have done foolish and even wrong things throughout history.

That being said, I think healthy discussion (best done face-to-face, but e-mail works, too) is good for us. I just don't want to get the idea that everyone needs to come to the same point of view or else...what? Get written up? Be excluded from "the group"? And if so, what group?

The place where these issues MUST be discussed and agreed upon is in your church. Your brethren with whom you worship must be in harmony with you on many topics. I don't, necessarily, because I'm not worshipping with you.

I don't really know many of you on this list, so I cannot know your motivations or purpose for writing what you do. I don't want to impute motives unjustly. And I certainly may have read something into your e-mail, Brother Olumuyiwa, that is not there. I also may be super-sensitive to this subject, so please forgive me for stepping out in this e-mail! I love the Lord's people, my brethren.

God bless,  
Nathan Williams

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David Willis here,

Just a quick point, perhaps it has been made already. I Cor.14:15-25 surely seems to teach us that "unlearned" and "unbelievers" were present in worship assemblies and even participated in the worship (saying "amen"). I would not try to stop an unbeliever from bowing in prayer, nor would I stop his taking of the LS, or participating in giving...although I may try to teach him of his need for entrance into the body of Christ before those acts would be eternally beneficial for him.

BTW, I'm not sure if this mailing is meant to be part of the "are examples binding?" discussion, but there has been a yahoo group set up for that, and as far as I know this discussion would be welcome in that group too. I will paste below my sig the email sent out to invite folks to join that group.

David Willis

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Dear Brethren,

I would like to deal with two issues, as follows:  
> The question of participation of unbelievers in the service.  
> The point raised by Nathan about seeking uniformity.

#### i) PARTICIPATION OF UNBELIEVERS IN WORSHIP SERVICES

In James 2: 1-9, James advises that the church should allow strangers to "mingle" within the church in terms of sitting position. He doesn't take care to advise that we should, however, make sure that they don't defile the service to God by partaking in praise & worship, giving, etc. The one thing I know that makes the Lord's supper stand out is that the Holy Spirit has given a stern warning regarding partaking of it - 1 Cor. 11:27-29. Good judgement shows us that we can't allow a non-Christian to take a lead in any form (singing, preaching, bible-classes, or other) because they can't preach/teach what they don't practice. But there are "passive" or "non-leadership" acts of service/worship (singing along, saying AMEN to prayer or to the preacher, giving,

demonstrating kindness to people coming in, etc); on these it is hard to separate them. Ever wondered why God didn't specify that non-believers must be separated from the believers during the service? He did it in the OT but left it to our judgement in the NT. Why is that? Are we to create "clear-cut rules" when God chose to give NO specific instruction on the matter?

I would like to warn the brethren regarding formulating sets of rules. Where do we draw the line in the sand between "precepts of man" and God's principles?

#### ii) THE QUESTION OF UNIFORMITY

I share similar sentiments to Nathan's. In the many years with the church (the universal body of Christ), I have leant the "hard way" that it is not always possible to treat each matter in exactly the same way, everywhere in the world, at exactly the same point in time - except direct commands.

Paul wrote:

a) "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." -> 1 Cor. 1:10. The same Holy Ghost prompted the same Paul to write:

b) "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you." - Phil. 3:15.

We need to note the SUBTLE DIFFERENCE between unity and uniformity. God teaches unity in the scripture. In most of the common translations (KJV, NKJV, RSV, ASV, World English Bible, & other translations in the "Power Bible" software), I was able to find the word "unity" but couldn't find the word "uniformity".

1) Uniformity simply put means: consistency, regularity, sameness, etc.

2) Unity simply put means: harmony, agreement, etc.

I am NOT a person that would be designated as a BIBLE SCHOLAR. Therefore, I will accept correction fairly easily, providing someone (properly) uses scripture to demonstrate that the Bible requires uniformity in ALL THINGS. My point is that we are to have unity in our faith and endeavour to serve the Lord with all sincerity, and YET remain united even when we are not doing each and every thing "uniformly". Phil. 3:15 gives me this thought.

These are matters of judgement. Local congregations are best positioned to take a particular stance that they believe to be "most-in-line" with God's word. The key thing is for them not to turn around and "judge" those that don't insist on the same approach and vice versa.

Lastly, I will give an example. While in Troas they met in the evening - i.e supper time (Act 20:7), I am not convinced that the time of day is as material as the memorial itself. For this reason, I don't insist on sticking to this pattern in all respects. Many churches normally partake of the Lord's "supper" in the morning - get my point? To apply this principle to brother Olumuyiwa's matter at hand: I wouldn't be perturbed if his congregation agrees to "discourage" non-believers from giving [I note brother Olumuyiwa that you YOURSELF are not able to say clearly that unbelievers MUST NOT give. You are using a "work-around" such as "discourage" them. That stance itself shows that the matter is not clear-cut even in your mind]. I understand brother Olumuyiwa's conscience situation YET when using my argument in (i) above, I know why we are not worried about the matter at our congregation.

NB: I must point out that I do believe that there is one truth though - that is: it's either we are to isolate non-believers or we are to let them participate as well. We just haven't yet proven beyond doubt exactly what God wants. In the meantime, we are to be understanding and bear with each other (Phil 3:15); doing what is to our best understanding of God's will, so that we remain united.

Brethren, please accept this letter in love. If someone understands differently to what I have said, kindly understand that this reflects my current position; as far as I can discern - but you are most welcome to write back and give any warnings, advice and/or corrections as you may be prompted in your spirit.

In Christ,

Thamsanqa

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Brethren,

I first cited I Cor 14 & James 2 to show that unbelievers **do** participate in (come to) worship but we must be careful not to create 'bad impressions' to make any disrespect the church or blaspheme the Lord. Whether such sees him/herself as having full membership or observer status may guide their level of participation and this again may be affected by the level of instruction received over time. For the third time, the question 'To what extent may non-Christians participate in true worship?' is NOT MEANT TO SUGGEST THAT WE SCREEN OR SEPARATE PARTICIPANTS... rather it is to establish what the scriptures say about the

acceptability of such worship to God! If it is fully acceptable to God then we don't need to preach to such people at all otherwise we are to teach them to become true worshippers. My plea is that we should not limit such a reminder to the communion aspect ONLY since some brothers say something to the effect, "*this is the only feast ordained for Christians. We advise that you do not partake if you are not a member of the Lord's Church. For those of us who are already Christians, the scripture says we should examine ourselves...*" Whereas for the collection, few ever say something like, "*this is a privilege and an obligation of the members of the church here. We do not solicit money from anyone else.*" Often times, every person present is encouraged to 'give or sow bountifully.' The reason I raised the matter is not because I don't want non-Christians to worship, far from it. It is because I wanted to point out **the inconsistency and moral issue** involved for those in the brotherhood who adopted what obtains in my congregation (a few individuals have since changed their 'leading approach' or manner of admonishing in these matters while I continue discussions with other teachers – we are yet to have bishops). I decided to share with you all so as to gather wider perspectives since my original question was considered strange yet my write-up wasn't refuted with scriptures.

Asking questions about the unbeliever is to make each person to think, the unbeliever inclusive. It is the non-Christian's prerogative on whether or not he should sing, give or take communion, etc. not mine. Our duty is to admonish such not forbid them as I concluded in my original article. My asking "why don't we equally discourage them..." is to [sarcastically] highlight the matter for consideration, not that '*it is not clear-cut*' in my mind. For example, I was once constrained to attend a close friend's wedding ceremony on a Saturday in a Catholic Church. I ignored the call for Catholics to come out for the communion, ignored the collection plate passed round the entire congregation but sang, prayed along, said 'Amen' and gave presents to the new couple. I had my conviction for my level of participation based on my understanding of the scriptures, I do not make it a habit to worship occasionally or regularly with Catholics. If I wasn't considered a member of a religious body and was admonished in a consistent manner that my worship is imperfect during fellowship, I might want to know why and possibly make suggested corrections (or abandon such a group) more quickly. For me, the limitations on children was incidentally established in the course of this study. So I think it would be helpful for brethren to also **consider** if little children should be 'goaded' to partake in the collection while being excluded from the communion.

In Phil. 3:15, Paul wants us to have a certain mind/attitude/understanding and prayed that those with a contrary position/mindset/understanding would attain the desired or perfect status in time after divine revelation. Thus he certainly wants Christians to be 'of the same mind and the same judgment' especially on revealed issues (doctrinal matters).

I have worshipped in several congregations (across continents) and would not have brought this matter to your attention if the issues raised were totally peculiar to my congregation without any relevance in other places. Of what purpose is recognizing the Bible as authoritative or even sharing study materials through books or websites (e.g. the "Bible Examples Discussion Group") if some think it dangerous and harmful to come to some brotherhood-wide consensus on doctrinal issues? I thought that in matters of opinion, liberty is needed while in matters of faith (doctrine), unity should be guided by divine revelation outlined in the inspired scriptures. Unity is commanded, uniformity may be optional.

I am glad we seem to have reached the 'consensus' by 'good judgment' that 'we can't allow a non-Christian to lead in any form' *although that inadvertently occurs once in a blue moon when a long-standing non-member who is not regularly admonished is mistaken for a Christian.* Thanks for your consideration.

-Olumuyiwa Asaolu

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Hi brother Olumuyiwa,

This has indeed been an interesting discussion. Thanks for bringing up the subject - I'm sure it has got many brethren meditating on God's word regarding the subject. I do realize that you have certain insights based on experience that some don't have - e.g. people being willing to receive direct contributions (not just as part of the general collection) from non-believers; non-Christians who land up perform duties (mistakenly; once in a while) as though they are part of the body of Christ; etc. Yes, I understand the cause for your concern.

When I discussed uniformity, I wanted to highlight that there are cases where approaches (not doctrine) may differ - but this should not divide us. Someone might find it very important to say things that constantly discourage participation of non-Christians in worship, till they repent (as you suggest). The next person might have a different approach (like my congregation where we don't make a distinction regarding singing, giving, & agreeing to prayer). Since God hasn't spoken directly w.r.t. this matter, judgement tends to play a big role.

Brother, let's do our best - in love.

Regards,  
Thamsanqa

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Hello brother Olumuyiwa;

I've followed the discussion but was not able to respond sooner because of lots of work. Here are some thoughts of myself concerning the things you wrote:

I would agree that the assembly of the saints is for the saints. As Paul states that Christians assemble as a church (1 Kor 11:18). So whatever happens in that assembly God instituted for the saints who are a member of the Lord's body and not for unbelievers. But we do have some verses that give us the idea that the worship service is not a closed meeting, but that it is possible for non-believers to enter so they can listen and be a spectator (1 Kor 14:24; Jam 2:2).

Should we pass them the Lord's supper? My answer is absolutely NO.

Visitors should be informed before the service starts that the Lord's supper is ONLY for the saints. If we are not sure if that person is a Christian then we should ask them to withhold until we know who they are and what they believe. But let me say that much care is needed in dealing with such a situation. The purpose of this should be to get together with that person so you can talk about these things. You have some who will be offended, but others who appreciate your respect and fear of the Lord.

We have several non-believers and even a woman who is (faith-only) who come to our services and who do not participate at the Lord's supper. We taught them from the Bible why this is so and they respect it and keep coming. This will keep a clear path that they are not 'of us' until they correct their lives with God. But I would agree that we cannot physically force anybody to

not participate, therefore we only offer the bread and the cup to the christians and do not offer it to the non-christians (we don't just let the plate and the cup be given from person to person).

I've seen churches where people who live in sin and are not a christian (who even mock God) are being allowed to participate at the Lords supper just because the brethren lack conviction and courage to deal with this matter. This malfunctioning of the local church creates minds who start feeling as if they are a part of the church while they aren't. Only those who depart from iniquity are of Him (2 Tim 2:19).

But I can agree with those who state that you cannot always know. Since we can only go forth by what people tell us, it is possible that you as a church let people participate at the Lords supper whom God does not know. We cannot always see what is in the heart, only God can. But we should do our best find out what we can.

Concerning the collection of the saints, I would use the same argument. The collection is from the saints and for the saints.

We do not let a plate go by where everybody can put the money on or in. We have a little box that has a fixed place and all the saints know that that is for the collection. This prevents people to feel forced to give and it gives the christians to freely give as they prosper and as there is need.

But we had the problem that the non-believers appreciated our work so much that they wanted to support it. We then explained them that the collection was from the saints and for the saints and that we are not after their money, but that we are interested in their souls. But some of them still insisted to give out of appreciation so we do not forbid them since we believe you cannot physically force them.

Hopefully my mail has been of any use to you.

If you differ with me please let me know, I would be happy to talk about it.

Brotherly,  
Peter Vandebuerie.

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Bro. Peter,

Your contribution is highly welcomed and I agree with you that churches need some conviction and wisdom to handle these matters. I would only say “**Judge in yourselves: is it comely** to encourage a non-Christian to give after he has been *latently* discouraged from receiving communion (I Cor. 11:27-29), knowing that members of the household of faith are the *top-priority beneficiaries* of benevolence (Gal. 6:10) from *the collection for the saints* (I Cor. 16:1-2)?”

It is hardly enough to inform that God will multiply *your seed* (money) sown (2 Cor. 9:10), I think it is better to always lay all the facts on the table and let the unbelievers decide whether to *first give themselves to the Lord* (2 Cor. 8:5). Why should one financially promote a religious body that s/he does not fully believe in?

Paul wrote that from a sinful or disorderly member “**...ye withdraw yourselves... with such a one, no not to eat... put away from among yourselves that wicked person.**” Surely, the apostle does not mean that we adopt a policeman attitude to separate the worshippers or screen some out but rather that we *rebuke sharply ... and admonish on the need for repentance and*

*forgiveness* as evident in Acts 8: 18-24 and II Cor. 2:1-10. I strongly doubt that he intended for us to bundle such out of the assembly or demarcate an onlooker's gallery for them. We may not know the spiritual status of a visiting stranger the first time (so some generic admonition is acceptable), subsequent interaction should guide us as to whether to continually sound the warning on the need for such person to become a Christian so as to render acceptable worship. For the children, we should know what is scripturally expected of them and not go beyond that which is written. **Interestingly, no-one has commented on whether little children should partake in the collection!** Even we as Christians need to reflect on whether our worship is acceptable. This is not merely in the form but also in the disposition and foundation - Psalms 19:14.

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All,

Leaving out the discussion on communion, lets just look at the contribution side. I'm presuming that some of this question is due to the desire of some members to gain as much money as they can for the congregation regardless of the source. Whenever we get to the point that we look at the raising of money as being an end in and of itself, then we start having controversy. I (as well as each of us) need to keep a relaxed attitude about the money and focus on whether I am giving enough and with a cheerful heart. We do ourselves a great disservice when we spend too much time worrying over how much someone else is giving.

Now, take a look at Acts 10. In verse 4 Cornelius is told, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God." This is before he became a Christian. He was not a Jew even. Therefore his gifts to the poor should have been ignored by God (if the thesis we are discussing is true). Since they were not ignored by God, then that would suggest that we have something wrong in our thinking.

As for children: Proverbs 22:6, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." We may have different methods of training children in different parts of the world. There are two possible lessons that have been pointed out that we may want to teach our children. One, to have our children know to respect God by fully obeying him in all actions before we have the honor of contributing. Two, to have our children know that contributing to Lord is one of the ways the Lord is pleased with us. I personally think that we can accomplish both. I personally started with my children when they were tiny (around 2 years old) when they wanted to mimic everything Dad was doing. I gave them a coin to put into the collection. They don't care how big the coin is (other than big enough so they don't put it in their mouth). Now they were doing it because it pleased Dad. Many years later -- when they are getting close to what I consider to be the age where they are accountable to God for their own actions, I stop giving them a coin. They understood that giving was now an act of worship and that they needed to be a Christian in order for it to be pleasing to God.

As for how the logistics of accomplishing the collection, I'm sure there are some methods that are better than others. It also has to be determined by the circumstances of the congregation and possibly the culture of the society. Here, we tend to pass the basket and most people tend to give by check (folded over so that no one can see what was written on it except the treasurer). Less than 5% is in cash. I'm in a moderate sized congregation (300+) in a fairly wealthy part of the US. I'm on the team of six people who count the money after services and gets it deposited to the bank. It already takes us up to 45 minutes just to count and process it all. Given the amount of people involved and the size of the contribution, I believe our method is fairly expedient. However, I don't think it is necessary that everyone else do it the same way. As I said before, we try to discourage visitors from giving by our words at the table. It so happens that here, people are not likely to give if they have been told that they don't have to. Therefore that is all that is



needed. Maybe in another location, there is more significance tied to money and more has to be done. However, I doubt that you will find a process that will fit for all people at all times.

Darrell

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Bro. Darrell,

I appreciate your perspective too. However, I still think a holistic approach might be helpful. I initially asked on giving but realized I had to study about the totality of acceptable worship.

Psalms 41:1, Proverbs 19:17; 22:9 are passages that describe individuals who act like Cornelius did and God in His mercy made a way for him to be saved. That situation is no excuse for the church to *enthusiastically expect and request* money from unbelievers. Yet if any does give during the general collection, we should accept in good conscience as you wrote earlier.

I am sure **our little children also want to partake in the communion**, at least mine does! This informed why I earlier wrote:

Indeed, personal prosperity and voluntarily setting aside beforehand further excludes **many** children who are usually given 'collection money' by their parents on Sunday mornings...

We are to teach others in word and by our OWN exemplary conduct not by requiring them to do something God has not authorized for them to do. It is this attitude of "trying to help God and children" that led to the unscriptural practice of infant baptism. In order to '*teach children to take the Lord's Supper when they grow up,*' should parents give them portions of their own piece of the bread and wine during communion? Let a child grow up to make his own choices; **don't impose what, when and how** he must give! There must first be a willing mind; according to what the child has from that set aside out of what God has prospered him (e.g. pocket money).

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Just a quick thought here.... should our children not bow their heads in prayer then since it might appear they are worshipping? Or follow along in their Bibles?

.02 worth

Wayne

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Bro Wayne,

my original article addressed that. The Bible however showed limitations on children with respect to the communion and the collection. For your question, these might help -Matthew 19:13, Mark 10:13-17, 2 Timothy 3:15

Regards.

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brethren,

I need to fall off this email list. at this time I just can't keep up with the discussion - lots going on here and I need to give my attention to that. thank you.

mark Roberts

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