

WHY DO WE HAVE WORSHIP SERVICES?

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The Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church teaches over and over again that the real worship of the Lord consists in a life of usefulness to the neighbor, which is based upon looking to the Lord for guidance and shunning evils as sins. Without that, prayers and hymns are meaningless. Formal, external worship by itself alone has never saved anyone.

Now, many people have decided that since genuine worship consists of these internal things—looking to the Lord, shunning evil, being useful—it is therefore unnecessary to have any formal worship services at all. The Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church, however, teaches otherwise. One of the very passages which stresses the importance of internal worship also states that people, when on earth, ought to be in external, formal worship also.

Why? First, because external worship helps to promote internal worship. Second, external worship helps to keep your daily natural life in order. Third, in your formal worship you learn things that prepare you for heaven. Fourth, even though you are not *conscious* of it, in external worship the Lord gives you states of holiness that He then preserves in you for use in heaven.

Suppose that you never went to any formal worship at all—never had and didn't now. There would not be much to inspire you to live a life of genuine religion, which consists in looking to the Lord Jesus Christ for guidance, shunning evils as being against His will, and being of use to your neighbor. Formal worship *reminds* you to live that kind of life, *teaches* you how, and helps *inspire* you to actually do it.

External worship also keeps our daily lives in order. It is a constant reminder of the orderly life the Lord wants us to lead. For example, if all the churches in the world were suddenly to disappear, with nothing to take their place, then, in many places on earth, hell would break loose. Formal religion helps to keep external life in order, and when externals are in order, the Lord can inspire us to good internal things.

The third use of external worship should be obvious. In worship you learn things that prepare you for heaven—namely, the truths of the Word, as read and explained by a minister. You learn such truths in your own reading, too, of course, but there is no denying that you also learn them in formal worship.

The fourth use of worship—gaining states of holiness for use after death—is not an easy thing to see. But the Lord has taught us this through revelation, and so we should accept it as true. Also, you can probably remember some service of worship which moved you, personally, to a new appreciation of the holiness of the Lord and of His Word.

Finally, if each morning (or even every day in family worship or school chapel) one of our activities is worship, then we can receive all the benefits of external worship just described. And, in addition, we can carry within us, throughout the day or week, a solemn determination to dedicate our lives to the internal, living worship of our Lord Jesus Christ.