

Toward an Understanding of Russian Baptist Worship

by

Mark J Harris

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**Mission Consulting Group
1605 E Elizabeth Street
Pasadena, CA 91104**

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INTRODUCTION

1. Purpose and Scope of Paper

This paper presents an inquiry into the normal practice of worship in Russian Baptist churches. Several comments are necessary in order to provide you with a proper perspective of the limited scope and purpose of the study that resulted in this paper.

The primary focus of this study is to begin to understand, first, how Baptists worship, and second, why they worship as they do. The main source of this understanding, as far as this paper is concerned, is a collection of comments from Russian Baptist leaders. I have also made a limited attempt to provide objective evaluations based on both personal experience and the comments of other observers that are not Russian Baptists.

There are at least four separate unions of Baptist churches in Russia. A few differences exist between them in their principles and practice, some which may concern worship. I have made no attempt to distinguish between those groups in this paper. Within the general scope of the issues presented in this paper, I consider that Russian Baptists of all kinds will appear very similar to any outsider. In spite of this, it must be said that the results of this study will have been primarily influenced by the approach of the registered Baptists in the Union of Evangelical Christians - Baptists.

The primary information for this paper was gathered in Moscow. However, though there are differences between practices in Moscow and other cities, and particularly villages, the central conclusions of this paper should generally relate to all Russian Baptists. I was careful to speak with key leaders that had experience in several locations, and who were aware of features that may be unique to Moscow or to villages.

2. Importance of Issue

The ministry of worship is the aspect of church life most evident to a cross-cultural observer. In spite of the language barrier, an American can quickly form opinions about worship by simple exposure to the sights and sounds in a Russian Baptist service. With the opening of Russia to outside influences, many such opinions have been voiced, often in an attempt to bring the Russian worship more in line with what those from the West deem to be more appropriate. In most cases, instructors and advisors from the West have been uninformed about the beliefs and traditions of Russian Baptists concerning the nature of worship, and as a result have failed to adequately deal with some of the most important issues as they offer their input.

There is a common American assumption that Russian worship practices, as with other aspects of church ministry, have developed without the benefit of deep reflection, being hindered by the years of existence under communist oppression. Since many of the practices appear "old-fashioned" and thus out of date, some American teachers have considered it their mission to educate the Baptists in modern worship methods, assuming that the American approach will be readily accepted once experienced. These are false assumptions that fail to recognize the presence of deep convictions in the hearts of Russian people. Although there has not been a great deal of formal training for those who lead worship, the informal traditions are often very strong and even dominating within the Baptist churches. A Western teacher or advisor may not be aware of a number of underlying beliefs that have undermined his attempts to encourage change.

In order to have any impact on his students, then, any instructor should bring at least a basic knowledge of the background and assumptions resident in his Russian students. This paper attempts to bring to light several of these cultural and spiritual issues.

3. Approach

The general approach I took in my study was to gather a series of issues and questions that would then be explored through observation and interviews. The major portion of the questions were taken from a study of "Worship, Rediscovering the Missing Jewel" by Ron Allen and Gordon Borrer. I designed an initial interview form and arranged interviews with Baptist pastors and leaders.

After only a few interviews I realized that the answers I was hearing often followed a much different direction of thinking from that which my questions were pursuing. In order to continue the process, I needed to thoroughly purge and redesign my questions.

Having uncovered key issues in earlier interviews, I then pursued these in further interviews. In addition, I visited several Baptist worship services and took notes to compare with the findings of my interviews. The notes from these processes form the basis of this paper.

4. Order of Paper

My original intent was to organize my paper along the lines of my interview questions. The same discoveries that led me to change my interview questions also led me to alter the intended order and contents of this paper. Seeking answers according to the strict order of the textbook proved to be an unfruitful means of developing the topic, so I created an outline that would present my findings in accordance with the Russian Baptist perspectives I discovered in my interviews.

This paper follows an order from the more general to the more specific. After a discussion of historical, cultural and Baptist foundations, the motivations behind Baptist worship are explored. Based on these principles, I present the general program and components of Baptist worship as practiced in the churches. A final section deals with a few current issues of worship, including the influence of the West. My conclusion contains the primary recommendations that I would make as a result of this work.

I must state here that there is a largely unavoidable overlap in several of the issues, and I have not taken great pains to eliminate redundancy. I intended the categories to be logical, but the subject matter has not always obediently fallen in line with my simple divisions.

5. Disclaimer

I want to emphasize that this is an introductory study. It is in no way meant to be a comprehensive treatment of the issue. There is much more work to be done to comprehend the history, recent practice, and current changes in worship among the Baptists. This paper could perhaps be read as an initial guide to assist those doing further work. On the other hand, I consider the perspectives that I am presenting, coming as they do from the opinions of Baptist leaders themselves, to present more than a general framework of the overall issue. The points of view should be taken seriously as informed, inside opinions, and utilized in conjunction with other, more formal studies of the topic.

I. FOUNDATIONS OF BAPTIST WORSHIP

A. Historical Background

1. Early Formation - The roots of the Russian Baptist churches can be traced to the middle 1800's with the arrival of German Mennonites into the Ukraine. This group brought with them a Bible-based gospel ministry, and invited Russian peasants to their simple meetings. Their focus on prayer, preaching, singing, and communion spoke directly to the hearts of the Russian people who had been used to the strict liturgical style of the Russian Orthodox church. The early people who attended continued to go to Orthodox services as well as the Mennonite meetings. However, the re-baptizing of believers and refusal to use icons, among other critical differences, eventually caused a complete separation from Orthodoxy

2. Self Concept - From the very beginning, Baptists maintained that they had inherited the example of the first apostolic churches in their form of worship. The main Biblical inspiration came from Acts 2:41-46, and specifically the example of the early church's focus on the apostle's teaching, fellowship, communion, and prayer. This basic pattern was considered the Baptist "ideal" as they met together. The precise means of worship initially evolved naturally, but soon took on forms that became standard wherever Baptists churches were started.

3. Predominant Mood - The result of separation from Orthodoxy in Russia was heavy persecution. Baptists have thus been an outlaw "sect" from the very beginning of their history. Pressure from Orthodoxy and from the government have always made the lives of Baptists difficult, and the believers became accustomed to sadness. Hymn composers wrote many hymns expressing this, such as one that spoke of "drinking suffering drop by drop." The mood of worship became dominated by the theme of sadness, suffering and trials as the lot of the Christian life.

B. Orthodox Influence

1. Conscious Striving for Contrast - Because Russia had been Orthodox for many centuries and had almost no Roman Catholic influence, the Russian people did not directly take part in the Reformation. Since the Mennonites were Protestant, however, the distinctives and convictions of Protestants were present in their patterns of church life - including worship. These were adopted by the Baptists, and those practices which contrasted with Orthodoxy became the basis for their own "protest" movement that turned away from many of Orthodoxy's deeply held traditions.

In its history, Russian Orthodoxy had experienced bitter controversy over even such issues as how one should position his hand as he crossed himself. It was natural that they would violently reject the Baptists, who refused to cross themselves whatsoever, did not light candles or pray for the dead, and did not baptize their infants. This last distinction caused some of the greatest anger, and many of the children of Baptists were even taken by force to be baptized in an Orthodox church. A strong feeling against bringing any Orthodox traditions into Baptist churches took root under these circumstances, and many of their most deeply held beliefs gained strength due to their need to be contrasted and defended against Orthodox tradition.

2. Unconscious Adoption of Features - Many aspects of Orthodoxy were not opposed in the Baptists' struggle against unbiblical traditions, and even had some influence over how the Baptists operated in their churches. After all, the early Russian Baptists had virtually all come out of a very long Orthodox tradition, which had formed in them a filter through which they viewed God and the Church. It could be said that these influences were as much a part of their general cultural heritage as they were a part of their specific religious convictions.

One example of this influence is a strong sense of distinction between the roles of

clergy and laity. In the Orthodox tradition, people were used to coming to church mainly to listen and obey. Passive observation, the norm in Orthodoxy, also became a general (though less pronounced) feature of Baptist worship. The idea of the church as a body working together as a team was never the guiding principle in the Baptist operations.

A related prevailing perspective, perhaps especially among intellectuals, was that faith is a very individual thing. A resistance against becoming part of a body of interdependent believers was one legacy of the institutionalism of Orthodoxy, where the laity is not directly involved in the workings of the church or the lives of other members. Baptists of course strove to follow the Bible in all matters of faith and conduct, but often inherited underlying attitudes of Orthodoxy that were, in effect, "in their blood."

C. Russian Cultural Context - In addition to Orthodoxy, the general Russian culture also affected how Russian Baptists developed. A few selected features can serve as examples.

1. Russian Disorder - Especially evident to Americans and Northern Europeans is the general lack of organization and order among Russians. This feature can be observed readily in many contexts, including how Russians drive on the street, how they manage their time, and how they interact in groups. The main influence that can be seen in the context of worship is the way that worship services are planned (or not planned, to be more precise). Americans, with their strong tendency toward orderly programs, often feel frustrated in the midst of this approach, but to Russians it all feels very natural.

2. Russian Tradition - Counterbalancing the lack of orderly planning is the very strong sense of tradition inherent in Russian thinking. For example, although the precise elements of any particular worship service are generally unplanned, the order and inclusion of certain elements of the service are held in place by a deeply held, though unwritten, traditions. An outside observer is thus very mistaken if he assumes that lack of order and planning translates into a general flexibility when it comes to the nature of Baptist worship. Russian Baptists are extremely conservative, and new ideas and traditions are very slow to gain acceptance.

3. Russian Love of Intimacy - Some of the most important and sincere interaction among Russians is that which takes place with a small group around the kitchen table. Russians feel most comfortable in a small group where they are not alone with their problems. This translates into a preference for smaller worship meetings as opposed to larger ones, and may contribute to a lack of desire for much church growth.

4. Russian Reservedness - The American observer often feels that Russians lack emotion due to their tendency toward closed facial expressions in public. This is one of the most common mistakes made in evaluating Russian people. In fact, they are deeply sentimental people, but prefer to keep their composure in any public setting, including that of a worship service. This cultural factor very strongly controls the expression of worship among Baptists.

II. THE HEART OF BAPTIST WORSHIP

A. The Spirit of Worship

1. Reverent and Subdued - Russian Baptists expect their expression of worship to be solemn and reverent. Church is a serious place, and a lighthearted spirit is considered a foreign element to be excluded from the fellowship. Baptists are especially sensitive to avoid the popular culture's entertainment approach, and are often offended by the attempts of Americans to bring humor into a church service. Worship cannot be carried on in the spirit of the theater or a show. The worshipper does not come to be entertained. One Russian woman, commenting negatively on an American service she had attended, said "I come to pray, not to laugh!" Such light hearted

attitudes are seen as disrespectful of God, and those that display them can quickly lose the respect of a Russian Baptist congregation.

Baptists do not believe that joy should be suppressed, but that it should be kept under control. Partially out of a rejection of Pentecostal expression, Baptists fear any tendency to work up one's inner feelings, which can be a form of self-deception. It is considered more important to gain understanding of the Word of God, and the heart that is obedient and submissive will feel a solemn weight in receiving God's truth. Joy will follow as one walks with the Lord, and will not need to be artificially produced. One Russian believer told me that a common story might circulate about a man who was thought to be spiritual because he was enthusiastic - but then he went mad. Although there are particular times when there is a mood of celebration in Baptist churches, the principle tone throughout the year will always remain one of solemnity.

2. Sad and Pessimistic - As the history of both Russia in general and Baptists in particular has been a sad one, the worship in Baptist churches has tended to express the sadness of earthly life. Hymns that express this sadness have always been close to the hearts of the Baptists, and Psalms of suffering those with which they could most readily identify. The very tempo of the music, which many American listeners have compared to that of funeral music, has continued to this day to express a heaviness of heart. With their very survival often in question, worship commonly expressed the need for patient endurance in the midst of earthly trials.

Although the central focus of worship has been an expression of growing faith through these obstacles and difficulties of life, many have noted that there has been a lack of hope expressed for earthly solutions. Russian pessimism, a strong feature of the culture at large, has stood in stark contrast to the general optimism of Americans. Observers from the West must understand the contrasting histories of the two countries to begin to comprehend the very different spirit of the traditional worship of the Baptist churches.

Young Russian believers are often caught in the middle between the spirit of their Russian elders and that expressed by American missionaries. This has had several effects. On the one hand, they have been encouraged by the inspiration of the optimistic American worship. A few young Russian people once expressed pleasant surprise to me after their first visit to a Russian evangelical church planted and led by Americans. The fact that they had come out feeling uplifted was uncommon to them after their experience in Russian Baptist churches. On the other hand, their elders sense the danger of the youth becoming superficial and positive in a worldly way as a result of their contact with the West. As Americans dislike the Russian tendency to come to church with a closed and discouraged attitude, not hoping for solutions to their difficulties, Russians point to the hypocrisy of the proverbial American smiling countenance that does not admit to the deep problems of life.

B. The Expression of Worship

The outward expression of Russian Baptist worship is a reflection of the inner spirit that has been described above. The description of this expression in this section will relate to the body of the believer in worship, and many of the points will overlap what has already been said.

1. Facial Expression - One of the aspects of Russian people that Americans first notice is the subdued nature of their facial expression. This is true of the culture in general, causing many from the West to ask, after viewing Russians on the street, "Why is everybody so sad?" This question in part reflects the American assumption that it is good to "put on a happy face." American cultural roots are opposite to Russian ones in this aspect. Especially owing to 70 years under oppression, Russians have always been taught to keep their emotions inside themselves in public. One young Russian man told me, "This teaching has settled into our marrow, and it is

hard to overcome this 'stamp' on our faces. But we can feel deep joy without having to show it on our faces. It would be very artificial to force us to smile. It may not look to Americans that we have joy inside, but we do." The Russian way is generally to hold a serious facial expression unless inner feelings force it to change involuntarily. That is, joy need not be suppressed, but it must be real. It should not be artificially pressed out. The American way is generally to force a positive expression regardless of inner feelings (and often to try to evoke the inner feeling).

Given these cultural differences, it is a grave error, commonly made by Americans, to judge Russians by their facial expressions. Americans in turn are judged by Russians to be phony and superficial. Each culture is looking at the other through its own spectacles, and misjudgment abounds on both sides.

2. Verbal Expression - The theme of subdued expression is carried forward into verbal aspects of worship. Keeping one's emotions in check means keeping one's voice under control in both singing and speaking. Loud exclamations of joy would be extremely rare in any Baptist setting. For example, one would not expect to hear anyone voicing an "amen" in the middle of a sermon - although respectful expressions of thanks are usually voiced by the congregation after a brother or sister has finished singing or reciting. The congregation as a whole will always join in with the final "amen" when anyone is praying aloud, but one would not hear spontaneous verbal expressions during the prayer itself. One who felt he needed to introduce such a practice without warning in a Baptist service (as some Americans have done) will certainly cause nervous distraction, and may indeed cause offense. Noisy verbal expressions of any sort, especially shouting, would normally be seen as the mark of secular culture as opposed to spiritual reality.

3. Bodily Movement and Posture - The use of the body in worship follows the theme of subdued expression, but also involves particular Russian Baptist interpretations how reverence to God should be displayed. In all aspects of worship, Baptists are very conservative with bodily movement. The body is held without extra movements, such as the raising or clapping of hands, during singing and praying. No dancing of any sort would be heard of, and applause after any music ministry would be rejected as a secular, unspiritual display. The Baptists have remained conservative in this area, even after being exposed to the practices of other countries, on the strength of unwritten tradition as opposed to explicit instructions. But, as mentioned earlier, tradition is strong.

Bodily posture reflects strong convictions regarding the connection of the position of the body with the inner reality of reverence and submission to God. This is most clearly seen in the insistence on standing or kneeling, never sitting, during prayer (both at church and at home). To remain seated during prayer is seen as a lack of respect. This perspective is, in the words of one young pastor, "too strong to be overcome." The congregation almost always stands for hymn singing. Beyond this, if a choir anthem is worded as a prayer to God, the entire congregation will again stand as it is being sung.

4. Bodily Adornment - Baptists have strong convictions about the need to avoid worldly dress, especially in a worship service. One's appearance should reflect reverence to God, which means conservative, unembellished dress. Men who are leading up front will always wear a tie, and usually a suit. (There are some Baptists who have even rejected the wearing of neckties as an unspiritual "decoration" - but these groups are rare). Women wear very little, if any, jewelry or makeup. This latter practice goes very much against the grain of the Russian culture on the whole, where women go to great lengths to adorn themselves. As a result, a great cultural difference has been felt by even Russian women who have visited Baptist churches. Adding to this difficulty is the common practice of Baptist men and women (especially the older ones) to

openly rebuke those who come to services so adorned. American Christian women are commonly viewed as worldly due to their appearance when they visit Baptist churches. This attitude is slowly changing with increasing exposure to the West, but mainly with younger Russian Baptists.

C. The Aesthetics of Worship

1. Art and Beauty - One feature of Baptist worship is the effort to attain a good balance in the expression of beauty in the church. On the one hand, the ornate beauty of Orthodoxy is avoided in favor of more simplicity. A general understanding is that something can become unspiritual if it becomes "too beautiful," or at least beautiful in the wrong way. On the other hand, the deep Russian love of beauty seeks fulfillment in spiritual matters. The result is a general orientation toward a practical aesthetic style that distracts neither by being too gloomy nor too gaudy. This issue is dealt with in several areas, including the following:

a. The Word - Being committed "people of the book," Baptists will tend to put the understood word in front of that which is purely emotionally pleasing. However, Russia has a famous tradition of literary excellence, and people tend to expect that ideas should be presented in a way that promotes an awe for the mystery and beauty of truth. Words that are too simple and plain, or that put ideas into artificially tidy categories, do not impress the Russian heart. One application of this principle is the widespread use of poetry recitations in worship services, where truth and beauty can work together to minister to Russian believers. On the other hand, Baptist hymns often have lyrics that many Russians would consider simplistic, indicating that straightforward truth has in these cases taken precedence over art.

b. Music - The Russian culture places a high value on beauty in music, and classical styles have been the ones most respected in church music. Orthodox services include very beautiful choir music, and Baptists have aimed for such beauty, yet in a simpler style. Here tradition predominates, and a very high percentage of the congregational hymns in Baptist churches are the same ones that have been sung since the turn of the century. More flexibility is seen in choir anthems and the music of ensembles and soloists, but there is always a desire to avoid the unserious style of music seen in the popular culture. Classical music education is considered a good direction for young people interested in music ministry.

c. Visual Art - The same general principles apply here as above, with the addition of a conscious rejection of Orthodox icon art. Orthodox icons are one of the means of worship most strongly rejected by Baptists in their separate evangelical tradition, and this rejection influences how they view art in their churches. There are even those on the most conservative side that reject even the displaying of a cross as being "too Orthodox," illustrating how Baptist opinions continue to be influenced by comparisons to Orthodoxy. Although representations of Biblical characters are not categorically forbidden (though of course some reject their use), they are not commonly seen in Baptist churches - and especially in any form that would in any way suggest comparisons to icons. If there are representations of Biblical characters, these will most likely be seen in reproductions of Biblical events such as the baptism of Jesus. Paintings most commonly present simple landscapes. Most of the art work in the churches surrounds verses of the Bible, and virtually all Baptist churches will have such texts either hanging or painted directly on their auditorium walls.

d. Architecture - Baptist churches consciously avoid the luxurious and ornate structures found in Russian Orthodox churches. The Baptist auditorium is traditionally called simply a "hall," and is not considered to be a holy place or a "sanctuary." The building itself is called simply a "house of prayer." Thus Baptists aim for simple but attractive structures, perhaps

with simple stained-glass windows. There is a strong tendency toward uniformity among the churches, and the architectural designs of a few brothers will tend to be utilized over and over again in various cities. Development in this area is presently hampered by a chronic lack of funds, so it remains to be seen how Baptists will design their houses of worship once they have the freedom to decide for themselves.

2. Aesthetic Quality - The achievement of beauty in worship depends upon the artistic giftedness of the individuals ministering. Baptists recognize, however, that effective ministry depends on inner spiritual beauty as well. The edification and utilization of the body of Christ takes precedence over artistic quality, so wisdom and patience is exercised in selecting those who will minister in worship services. The inner disposition is considered more important than a high level of excellence. If a believer is artistically gifted, he is nonetheless expected to grow spiritually as well in order to minister to the body. The worship service must not be conducted as if it were a "show," where talent is evaluated only externally. On the other hand, those who so minister and are spiritually mature are expected to work at improving their art. Those who have a combination of talent and maturity are given the most opportunities to minister.

II. THE PROGRAM OF BAPTIST WORSHIP

A. Worship in the Church Ministry - Baptists would not generally speak of a particular "worship" ministry of their church. It is more of a Western analytical approach to in this way compartmentalize the life of the church into such categories as edification, evangelism and worship. Americans are constantly "tinkering" with their church life, taking it apart piece by piece to see what needs to be changed. Russian Baptist churches are more likely to evaluate themselves by how well they follow tradition. The way the churches operate and the programs they offer mainly reflect ways that have been passed down over the past century. The concept of a "balance" of ministries is not a well understood concept. Problems of "imbalance," though perhaps at times sensed by Baptists, would not usually be expressed as such.

If you ask a Russian Baptist leader, "How is your church's worship ministry?", you may not be understood. Only very specific questions about how worship is carried out can be answered, but even there one will have difficulties. There is no one Russian word that is the equivalent of the English word "worship." The word usually used to translate "worship" has the literal meaning of "kneeling down," with a metaphorical idea of one's heart attitude to God. Several Russian ideas must be combined in order to capture the idea of worship as the American church defines it.

Based on Baptist practice, worship is defined by the components of the Baptist service. And here it could be stated that worship as an overall ministry of the churches is not as emphasized as hearing and obeying the Word of God. This would not be discussed as such, but most would recognize that this is partially in response to what is seen as the excesses of Pentecostal churches. Those who sense an imbalance lament that they see too much in the church of simply "learning," and not enough vigorous activity in other areas such as evangelism and worship.

On the other hand, the music aspect of worship is very important within the church, as evidenced by the fact that the position of music director is a very influential position in the church for which there is no analogy in education, evangelism, or other ministries. The music director is commonly the second most important position in the church. Often the choir can be composed of half of the congregation. The worship ministry is thus often equated with music.

B. Planning for Worship

1. Background - The primary approach to planning Russian Baptist services is for the brothers to meet just prior to the service and decide what will be done. There are at least three reasons for this approach. The first reason is historical: Baptists have had to operate under a great deal of uncertainty in their history. It was very difficult to plan ahead when persecution threatened to disrupt those plans in several ways. It was simply best to wait and see who had made it to the service before making any final decisions. The second reason is cultural: the Russian people in general do not operate in a Western-style organized and orderly manner. This feature of the Russian character is seen in almost all aspects of the society, and the church culture is no exception. The third reason is spiritual. Baptists tend toward a mystical approach to God's guidance, and believe they should trust in the Holy Spirit to put together the elements of a service to complement each other the way God desires. To plan too definitely would be to act presumptuously. How can one know whom God will prepare to give a testimony, for example, on any given Sunday? As one young pastor told me, "We don't consider this to be 'guessing,' but rather 'trusting'."

2. General Approach - Since the components of the service, as listed below, are fixed in place by tradition, it is usually only necessary to decide who the specific participants will be. There is variety allowed within the overall structure, and much spontaneity is allowed. The lead pastor and/or the brothers' council usually controls the specifics of the service. The lead pastor generally appoints the preachers, the choir director has selected anthems based on choir practices (although even the choir may find out that morning specifically which anthems they will sing), and other participants may have been selected to recite poetry or sing. There are few firm rules about when these decisions need to be made, but the pastor will generally put the service together just before it begins. The normal service lasts for two hours, give or take ten minutes or so. Several decisions about the service are made as the service is in progress, based on the amount of time that is being used by the elements of the service. One will see the pastor sitting with other Brothers on the platform during the service, and individuals will be bringing him notes all during the service. Some of these notes are prayer requests, but others are from people who are ready to give a testimony, recite poetry, or sing.

Baptist services do not follow any liturgical calendar, and are not planned in order to follow any particular theme. The only exception to this would be special services that celebrate a few important holidays such as Christmas, Easter, and a few others. However, many expect to see a harmony in the service based on their belief that the Holy Spirit is orchestrating. One time I was preparing to preach in a Russian Baptist church in the Ukraine. I had told my text to my translator. As a few elements of the service prior to my sermon proved to be following related themes, he whispered to me, "I can see how the Holy Spirit is putting this service together."

Some consider that the controlling nature of Russian Baptist leadership (a feature common to all kinds of leadership in the Russian culture) precludes good planning for worship. Effective planning requires a teamwork approach, with some level of delegation. Many leaders are hesitant to delegate for fear of losing some control. The practical result is often that few will get involved in planning for services, leaving that all up to the pastor.

C. Organization of the Service - Russian Baptist Sunday worship services do not vary much in their components between Sundays and between churches. The essentials include preaching, congregational singing, and prayer. For many churches the choir is also not optional. Optional elements include special music, testimonies and poetry recitations. These will all be described in more detail in a later section.

A standard order of the above essentials frames the outline of worship services, with the optional elements filling in the gaps. How strictly the order is followed may sometimes vary by church, and will often be disrupted a bit when there are guests such as American preachers or singing groups, but the vast majority will follow almost the same outline, an example of which is as follows:

1. The greeting and opening prayer.
2. Opening congregational hymn.
3. A short "call to prayer" sermon, after which the preacher leads in prayer.
4. More congregational singing.
5. The first sermon, 15-20 minutes long. Following this sermon, two or three from the congregation will pray, and the preacher will close in prayer.
6. More general singing, choir anthems, small groups singing.
7. The central sermon, usually 40-45 minutes long.
8. More general singing, choir anthems, poetry recitations, other optional elements.
9. The final sermon, usually including a call to repentance.
10. Final closing hymn with invitation to repent and come forward.
11. Prayer with those that have come forward, if any.
12. Announcements, reading of prayer requests, and greetings from visitors and request to take greetings to others.
13. Closing prayer, including prayer for the requests just mentioned.

D. Body Life and Participation

1. Background - There has been a general lack of success among Baptists in the area of getting the whole body to participate in the ministry of the church. The work has often fallen onto the shoulders of a few people. The pastor has often been expected to do almost everything, with relatively few to help. There are several factors which have contributed to this situation, including the following:

a. Orthodox Influence - The strict separation between priests and laity in Orthodoxy is rejected by Baptists, but it has not been historically easy to overcome the congregational passivity resulting partly from the Orthodox influence. Church leaders in Baptist churches have a great deal of control, and the average member does not naturally feel a sense of obligation to get involved in the workings of the church. Active promotion of involvement is required in order to bring about higher levels of participation.

b. Soviet Institutional Influence - Fear of consequences and lack of rewards created a poor environment for volunteerism in Soviet culture. Westerners often note that Russian people generally fail to take initiative, and must be told exactly what to do in work situations. Church leaders as well often struggle to overcome what one Russian pastor called the "detached observer syndrome" infecting his congregation.

c. Legacy of Persecution - Soviet authorities were constantly on the attack against the churches, and did all that they could to discourage active involvement by members. In many cases, churches became dominated in attendance by old women. In all cases, church membership was limited in size, and often there was a lack of people to choose from to be involved in the services. Very few had training of any sort, which was rarely available. The work thus tended to be carried out by a minority in the churches.

2. Body Involvement in Worship - In spite of the difficulties mentioned above, it is considered a very good thing for people to be involved in worship. Assuming that people are

able and willing, there is a general desire and readiness to give them opportunities to take part in the services. Given the large variety of elements and length of Baptist services, it can be said that Russian Baptists take more active part in their worship services than do their American counterparts. In many small churches, assuming the atmosphere has been favorable to including the body in the services, a great variety of the members can be directly involved in the service in one way or another. In large churches the extent of involvement can at times be limited to a chosen group of people.

The controlling factor defining the extent of body involvement is the attitude of the pastor. The leadership sets the tone for the whole church. A controlling pastor may limit the extent of involvement, while a nurturing pastor may try to get everybody involved. Either way, the pastor and other Brothers will observe the abilities and spiritual maturity of individuals in the church to evaluate who will be involved in services, and to what extent.

3. Brother and Sister Roles - The brothers in the churches have complete control over church activities and decisions. Only brothers are allowed to preach or teach in the churches, and fulfill all other leadership roles. Their position is emphasized by the fact that a select group of brothers will sit on the platform for the entire service. The lead pastor always sits near the pulpit, and directs the ongoing service from that position. Sisters, who usually make up the majority of Baptist churches, also have several ways to be directly involved in services. They often sing (in the choir, small groups, or as soloists), and very often recite spiritual poetry.

4. Youth Roles - Young people have always been allowed to take part in services, and Russians display a special love for their ministry, either in music or recitations. Children sit with adults for the first part of the service before being released to go to Sunday School. Young people often minister as a group, and a youth choir is commonly formed. Many churches have special youth services periodically, which are oriented more toward youth involvement and youth issues. The contrast between the youth and adult services is not so pronounced as it is in the West, as Russian Baptist youth are expected to respect and continue Baptist tradition.

E. Venues of Worship - The corporate worship service in the main hall of the church is one of the very few settings where most aspects of worship, as described above, take place. Home settings have not often been utilized, for several historical and cultural reasons. However, small groups may informally meet for prayer and discussion (the Russian way - around the dining room table). Believers are encouraged to have an active prayer life, and this is the primary teaching in the church regarding worship as a way of life. Only time will tell how new freedoms and influences from the West will affect the understanding among Russian Baptists of worship and its various possible locations and expressions.

IV. THE COMPONENTS OF BAPTIST WORSHIP

A. Heart Preparation - Russian Baptists aim for a solemn and attentive atmosphere in their worship services from start to finish. This tradition is very strong, and consequently there has been little need to focus any special extra attention on preparing the congregation for worship prior to the start of the service itself. No specific traditions have formed that guide how all Baptists approach this issue, and attitudes toward how believers should prepare themselves for worship vary among pastors. Many consider that this is the responsibility of the individual believer, and recognize that the same service can warm one heart and leave another cold.

The service itself, beginning with the meeting of the brothers and other groups to pray just prior to it, is designed to lead hearts to serious dealing with God. There is very little talking before the service begins. Some of the most conservative churches have not allowed any

greetings before the service, but this would be a rare phenomenon today. In one younger Baptist church I visited, composed mainly of newer believers, the pastor stood up several minutes before the start of the service to ask the congregation to be quiet and prepare their hearts to receive God's Word. This would not have been required in an established Baptist church. The services always begin with a call to prayer, as noted above, which sets the tone for the rest of the service. It should be noted that with their two-hour services, much time is available for hearts to be led into worship, unlike the relatively short American worship service.

B. Prayer - Prayer during worship services is similar to that seen in American services, with a few notable exceptions. The first is the practice, which I have seen in Baptist churches in all parts of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, of spontaneous congregational prayer following the opening "call to prayer" sermon and perhaps after the last sermon. Two or three from the congregation will pray out loud in turn, and the one who preached the sermon will close. The prayers are supposed to follow the theme of what has been said, but it is very common for old women in Russian Baptist churches to drift off the theme and ramble on for several minutes. This has become a problem in many churches, especially as some of the older women become carried away emotionally, weeping and repeating themselves over and over again in their prayer. I have been told that the leaders have taught against this practice, and one time I noticed that the preacher had to simply cut into the middle of a particularly long prayer to give his closing prayer. However, in general the practice seems to be tolerated, because it continues in most services I have attended.

The second practice is that of praying at the end of the service for specific prayer requests that have been brought to the attention of the pastor. During the service, little notes will be passed up to the front, often carried to the pastor by young children. On many of these notes are written prayer requests. At the very end of the service the pastor will read the requests, and then pray for them along with his closing prayer.

In addition to these regular practices, I have observed a few other features of prayer in services. In baby dedications and ordination of leaders, a microphone is held up to the participants on the platform (commonly a husband and his wife), and they are both expected to pray before the congregation. As mentioned before, all prayer is done either standing or kneeling, never sitting. At the end of a prayer offered by an individual, it is most common to say, "...in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit...", after which the whole congregation will join in to say "amen."

C. Music - As mentioned earlier, the music ministry is very important in Baptist churches. Along with a strong traditional bent are equally strong convictions about the nature of music that should be used in churches. Traditional Baptist church music is similar to traditional American church music, but with more Russian melodies and with a definitely slower pace. Baptists generally believe that the rhythm of spiritual music should never overwhelm the melody. As Westerners have come to minister in Russia, they have often offended Baptist believers with their fast-paced contemporary music, even that which would be considered "mild" by the standards of American Christian youth. Obviously then, Baptists are especially insulted by loud rock music, and would never allow it in their churches.

The issue of music styles is a relatively new one for Baptist leaders to deal with. For many years they were closed off from Western churches, and there was little question about which music would be used in churches. Since many Russian young people enjoy the music they hear from the West, a controversy has arisen over whether or not music can be inherently unspiritual. The older believers will comment that music should never "whip up" emotion, and

that such physiological stimulation is not compatible with the true spirit of worship. Young people counter that church music must not always sound like a funeral is in process, but should reflect a lively hope and joy in Christ. As in the West, this debate will likely continue for some years. It should be noted that churches in the smaller cities, which have less exposure to the West than the churches in the big cities, tend to be much more conservative in the issue of new music styles (some even reject the newer Russian music that has been introduced into other, more "progressive" Baptist churches.)

If music changes in Baptist churches, it will most likely be seen in what is sung by choirs and special music. It would be extremely unusual for new music to be introduced for general congregational singing, where the same hymns have been sung for several generations. Individual believers procure and bring hymn books to church with them, and in the most popular of these only the lyrics are written, not the music. The tunes to most of the hymns in the book are commonly known, and it seems that the percentage of them which continue to be sung in the Russian churches is much higher than the percentage of an American hymnal used in American churches.

D. Poetry - One tradition of Russian Baptist churches not commonly found in the West is that of reciting spiritual poetry. This has traditionally been a ministry open to women in the church, who are not allowed to otherwise speak from the platform, and they are the ones which have presented the vast majority of the recitations. Some older Russian women have memorized a great volume of such poetry and can recite them all from memory today. This is also a ministry open to children, and a special warmth is observed for this ministry among Russians, who are very sentimental lovers of children. The recitations are not given stiffly, but rather with some dramatic or sentimental expression, which Russians are not afraid to reveal in public.

E. Scripture Reading - Almost all reading from the Bible in worship services is done in connection with sermons, and the preacher is the one who does the reading. It is common for an extended passage to be read prior to a sermon, with the congregation reading along silently. It would be more rare for a passage to be read alone as a means of worship, although there may be times when Psalms may be either read or recited. One would not see a congregation reading a passage together, nor would any form of responsive reading be utilized in worship.

F. Preaching - The preached word could be considered the center of Baptist worship, and there are always either three or four sermons preached in the course of a service. A heart that is attentive and submissive to receive God's Word is the expected response of the listener, an important aspect to what Baptists would consider "worship." To hear and obey is more important than to make loud proclamations of praise to God, and Baptists would especially tend to try to set themselves apart from Pentecostal tendencies in this regard. (Note: I have also written a paper specifically focusing on Russian Baptist preaching, and will not take the space to repeat those observations in this paper.)

G. Other Components - One would rarely see components other than those discussed above in Russian Baptist services. Baptists have never include a recitation of any creeds during their services. No form of litany would be accepted, either. It may be possible, and more likely in smaller settings, for a believer to give a testimony of what God has done in his or her life. However, if a form of worship has not been traditionally done in a church, it is not likely to be adopted. Russian Baptists are easily made uncomfortable or even frightened by unfamiliar elements, and would tend to say, "It's not *ours*."

V. CURRENT ISSUES IN BAPTIST WORSHIP

A. Societal Changes - The fall of communism in Russia brought about the start of many changes in Russian Baptist churches. Church life under communism was very difficult, but it can also be said that it was in some ways simpler. The tools of the enemy were clearly understood, and there were not many ongoing choices to be made regarding how the church should operate. The years since 1989 have brought freedom and opportunity for the churches, but with these benefits have also come new challenges. Some of these challenges have to do with the issue of traditional worship practices in the churches. The following are just a few of the new issues that are being dealt with:

1. Visitors and Sensitivity - Under communism an attitude had grown among the churches that unbelievers must accommodate themselves to the churches if they wanted to leave the world and join God's "little flock." In many cases it was desirable to have strict rules of life for believers if they wished to take communion, because this helped to separate the true disciples from the informants. Confrontations were common when unbelievers would visit a service and violate Baptist principles of apparel or behavior. It was expected that truly repentant people would have no trouble making the required changes. Today, with the stigma of visiting or joining churches removed from society, more visitors have been seen in the churches (especially in the early days after communism). Pastors and leaders are being challenged to deal with what has often been perceived as abrasive and unfriendly treatment of unbelieving visitors to their churches. One common example is the tendency of older Baptist men and women who will confront a woman for wearing earrings to church. Another issue is the fact that so many young people are turned off unnecessarily by aspects of the Baptist services that have become remote from the surrounding culture in ways that do not necessarily reflect spiritual issues. As Baptists are challenged to become more active in evangelism, the receptiveness of their churches to visitors is one of the more commonly raised issues.

2. New Church/World Paradigm - The great difficulties under communism formed a mindset that runs very deep in the hearts of many Baptist believers. Many leaders and members lived their whole lives under oppressive conditions, and are not always altering their way of thinking to fit the new reality. They continue to preach and lead, in many ways, as if the times had not changed. For example, there are many leaders that want a simple, quiet style of church life that is not so active and conspicuous. They are often threatened by the difficulty of managing an active, growing, changing group). Changes in worship that might attract new people may be wrongly rejected in an attempt to keep the church the way it is. Many of the established leaders have thus been slow to seize the new opportunities for evangelism. Worship in many cases tends to emphasize and repeat themes of surviving under suffering with which newer believers cannot identify. In these ways the established leaders seem out of touch to the newer segments of their congregations. Not all of these leaders are old men - conservatism runs deep in many middle aged men as well. Complicating this, many of the new believers are older people. The lines of division are not based on physical age, but on spiritual age.

3. Multiplying Churches - In 1986 there was only one registered Baptist church in Moscow. There were many active young people, and the church was completely overcrowded. In retrospect, it has been described as a pregnant woman ready to give birth - and this is exactly what happened. By the beginning of 1997 there were almost 40 churches in Moscow. The leaders of these new congregations have commonly come out of the main Baptist church, but many of these churches are made up of people that have been believers for less than 4 years (and many much less than this), and who have never been a part of an older Baptist church. With

young leaders and a congregation without a resistance to changes from old traditions, for the first time there is an atmosphere for making alterations to the worship in some Baptist churches.

B. Western Influence - Direct exposure to Western worship theories and practices has brought about a variety of responses from Russian Baptists. Although the Baptists have an old history of borrowing from the West (many American hymns were borrowed in the early part of this century, and can still be heard today in Baptist churches), they also have a strong sense of Russian identity and tradition. They are not generally looking for newness just for the sake of newness, an approach more common in the West. They have thus evaluated carefully what they have seen and heard, and the following are a sample of some of what has been accepted and rejected.

1. What Has Been Accepted

a. General Principles - Western evangelical churches and seminaries have a tradition of studying issues thoroughly, and debating whether or not their practices square with the teachings of Scripture. Tradition is less likely to thwart such a study in the West as it is in Russia. Yet Russian Baptists are believers in the authority and inerrancy of God's Word, and when they are shown a principle that can be supported clearly by the Bible, they are ready to listen. Russian leaders have noted that Americans are good at formulating theories, and Russians will take those theories and search for ways to apply them to the Russian culture.

b. Positive Innovations - If Americans introduce ideas for worship services that do not violate Russian Baptist beliefs or traditions, there are many leaders who are ready to try out these innovations. Younger leaders in newer churches are the ones more likely to introduce these changes in their services but willingness to adapt varies greatly from leader to leader. The following are a sample of a few of the innovations that have been accepted by some leaders:

- Praying over the offering after it has been received.
- Changes in the order and length of the service.
- The use of more special services, designed in specific ways for specific purposes.
- Reducing the number of sermons at times, even going to just one sermon.
- Handing out outlines of sermons to the congregation.
- New music, as long as it fits into the Baptist idea of what is proper for worship.

c. Technology - The Baptists don't seem to have any resistance to the use of modern technological aids in worship services. Suggestions for improving sound systems, as well as gifts of electronic equipment, have been readily received. Soloists have begun to sing with background music on tape, an innovation not available to most Baptists in the past.

2. What Has Been Rejected

a. Frivolity - As mentioned earlier, Russians believe that worship calls for a serious, reflective attitude. Americans should not be strangers to this conviction, because it was the one that held sway in American churches until relatively recently. Americans who have brought to Russian services their modern, lighthearted attitudes have not been respected by Russians. A humorist is not respected as a mature, godly person, and can easily offend Russian Baptists by displaying this kind of attitude during worship. A warm, natural laughter at a human situation is not absent from Baptist services, but it is used sparingly, and never promoted for its own sake.

b. Unrestrained Expression - To a Russian Baptist, the dignity of a worship service is violated by loud expression in worship. Baptists expect that voice and emotions should be controlled (the tendency of older women to weep during their prayers would be one exception to this), and are distracted by American tendencies to be too open with their talking, laughing, waving, and other expressions. One illustrative story is told of a group of Americans who took an

excursion to Norway to look at its bleak nature. The Europeans who were also there were taking in the scenery quietly and somberly, but the Americans were always laughing, shouting, and talking with everybody. As a result, the Europeans always tried to keep clear of the group. Americans on Russian subways are always easy to pick out, because they all talk at once in loud voices, disrupting the normal reserved atmosphere of the public place. Russians tend to think that Americans have little sense of how to behave themselves in different situations, bringing the same loud, party atmosphere to every event - including church.

c. Pride in American Ways - Many Americans come to Russia with an attitude that the American way of doing things is the standard for other cultures, and expect that Russians have just been waiting for them to come and tell them how to do things. This attitude is both arrogant and ignorant, and has damaged the respect of Russians for American spiritual maturity. Russian leaders do not look to Americans to teach them **how** to pray or worship, unless it is the sort of positive innovation mentioned earlier (which would be considered a sharing of ideas as opposed to an enlightenment). Russians are very conscious of the Russian way of doing things, and will not respond to American attempts to "set them straight." One example that was given to me was the American tendency to want to single out visitors in order to "welcome" them. This practice is very offensive to Russian visitors, and will result in scaring them away. Baptists know that they should make it possible for a visitor to slip in, observe, and slip out if that is what he wants. Americans have come in without asking questions about such things, and insensitive use of American ways has often caused problems for their Russian hosts.

d. Slipshod Efforts - As a result of the rush of untrained amateurs into Russia to "reach Russia for Christ," some very poor quality ministry has been brought into the Russian churches. Often a group of Americans will stand up to sing a song for which they have hardly practiced, with predictable unpleasant results. Russian musicians practice seriously to offer their ministry, but some Americans have come with an impromptu, undisciplined, "this will do" attitude.

C. Generational Changes - Cultures commonly see shifts in attitudes and practices over time, and differences between the upbringing and circumstances of youth from their elders usually has a great deal to do with this. Certainly the great changes in Russian society, as mentioned above, have brought about or exposed differences between the youth and their elders in Baptist churches. However, these changes must be viewed within the overall Russian context.

1. The Strength of Tradition - Respect for tradition runs deep in the Russian heart, and is not so easily put aside as it is in the West. Even in Baptist churches begun by younger, more progressive men, the basic character of the older Baptist churches has been maintained. If there are innovations, they are generally introduced very slowly, so as not to offend older people. The young leaders are restrained in their approach to change, and are not so apt to "try something different" just to experiment.

2. The Openness of Youth - As long as the spirit of the traditions is not violated, young Russian people are much more open to innovations than their elders. As with all young people, they tend to be more idealistic, and so will aim for practices that are more spiritually real to them. One example of this was expressed by a young pastor, who said that in their young church they only use hymns from the traditional hymnal, but are more selective in which hymns they sing. Those that do not reach the heart of their younger congregations, perhaps due to being lacking in joy or expressing weak doctrine, are not being sung. Many of the young leaders are sensitive in several other ways, desiring to remove hindrances from reaching Russians for Christ.

As a result of the innovations of the younger pastors, many young people have been

moving toward these younger churches, and as a result there are more varieties of styles in Baptist churches today than at perhaps any other time in their history. The music of these churches may sound very conservative to the American ear, but is often quite different to the Russian ear, and is more attractive to younger people than that of the older churches. The younger churches also tend to have more active participation among the membership, since a larger percentage of them are younger. It is possible that a gulf could become fixed between two kinds of Baptist churches in the future, but for now the young churches have the support of the Baptist Union and are not seeking for any independence from the Union.

3. The Control of Elders - In the more traditional churches, where older Russian Baptist men are the elders, their attitudes toward tradition and innovation will be the determining factor in the direction of the church. The leaders have strong control in the churches, and new ideas should not be expected to bring about changes in a democratic manner. If the senior pastor is against a change, it will not be adopted.

Many have reported a tendency with Russian leaders to be a bit jealous for their positions. One way that some have protected their positions is to try to have control over all aspects of the church operations. When there are many young people wanting to be active in church ministries, the response by the pastor is likely to be an attempt to control the work (or even discourage it) as opposed to encouraging it (let alone "setting it loose"). Russian leaders are not used to working together in teams and delegating authority, and this is something that may be very slow to change among the older brothers. As a result, innovations in worship in most of the older churches may never happen.

CONCLUSION : RECOMMENDATIONS

Russian Baptist worship was born in Russia, and raised in a Russian way to express the love of Russian believers for their Lord. If there is one concluding recommendation to those Americans who are ministering to Russians it is this: let Russians be Russian. The culture and history of the Russian people is completely different from that of Americans - in some ways nearly opposite. Russians should not be expected to view spiritual reality through American spectacles, nor encouraged to adopt practices that express sentiments born in a foreign context.

On the other hand, Russian Baptists are willing to receive training in universal principles of spiritual life and ministry, and welcome exposure to the practices of other cultures - provided that they be allowed to determine the application of those principles they have learned to their own churches. Where there have been blind spots in their way of thinking, Baptists (and most likely the younger leaders) are often willing to recognize and correct them. On the other hand, they are usually astute observers of the blind spots of their American counterparts, and are more than ready to reject those things that they believe are not proper.

Most of what I would recommend can be gleaned directly from the body of this paper. Here I would just like to repeat and summarize a few key recommendations that I would make to those who would participate in worship or teach principles of worship to Russian Baptists.

1. Respect Russian Traditions - Go into Russian Baptist churches with a readiness to not simply tolerate, but deeply appreciate what Baptist believers bring to the practice of worship. Too many Americans go into a Russian service and begin to make comparisons with what they believe worship ought to be like, not realizing that their notions often come from a very limited cultural viewpoint. They are ready to find fault, and often do so. Much of this attitude comes from an assumption that Russians were denied the gospel, and it is up to Americans to come in

and tell them how to do things. Don't make this mistake, and display an attitude that is very offensive to Russians. They are to be respected for their Christian lives and their interpretation of how to worship God, and we should seek to gain from the secrets they have learned that have escaped Americans in their history of freedom of worship.

2. Examine American Traditions - Many teachers do not take the time to test their own assumptions against the Bible, especially when competing assumptions assail them from another culture. Many Christians of other cultures are aware that American attitudes tend to change with every new wind blowing across the landscape, and yet whatever is the latest rage is preached as gospel to even unfamiliar cultures. Such teachers are missing a golden opportunity to reexamine and gain sharper insight into spiritual principles by sharpening their perspectives against those of their Russian brothers. We should not want to export products that were custom-made for the fickle and selfish American public, and should be ashamed of introducing new, untested theories that have not even resulted in greater godliness in our own churches. Go with the idea of learning as well as sharing, and be careful to pass on only wisdom that has stood the test of time in more than one culture.

3. Come as Loving Servants - Russians, as all other people, respond well to love. Once you have communicated respect and humility, your kind and sensitive willingness to help will be welcomed with open arms. This may be obvious when stated, but is often violated by the hypocrisy of Americans who look down on their Russian brothers. I once attended a Baptist worship service where a group of Americans were visiting. They took time during the service to express many attractive sentiments, but afterward I walked past their bus and heard them expressing a different attitude once they were among themselves. They were loudly complaining about how the slow tempo of the Baptist music was "driving them crazy." To minister in love takes a greater amount of maturity than this, and one of the saddest practices among Americans in Russia is "bashing" the Russians for everything that is different from American culture. Left unchecked, this kind of attitude results in a ministry to try to turn Russians into Americans rather than a service that aids Russians to reach their own people in their own way.

4. Bring Beautiful Music - When ministering to Baptists, bring music that has a universal appeal due to its beauty, not a pop-cultural appeal with shallow or jazzy words, tempo or melody. Ask yourself if your music promotes reverent joy - or does it express simply excitement and fun. Is your attitude when ministering in music one that is glorifying to God? Many are not able to minister effectively in this way because they have a shallow walk with the Lord which has been hindered by worldliness. When ministering to groups solely composed of youth, you will have more flexibility with music, but even then the principles mentioned above should apply. Russian young people are very aware of American popular music, and listen to it regularly. You may be stepping into a situation where your use of music in ministry could cause some to stumble. Since you will be responsible before God for this, present a music ministry that you are certain will lead the listeners to greater godliness.