



## *Changing Our Worship*

Have you ever watched a child who is just learning to tie his shoes? With careful precision he makes the first, big loop. Then with slow, deliberate moves he takes the other lace and makes the little loop around the big one. Then with all the concentration he can muster, he draws part of that second lace through the little loop and pulls with the big loop to make the knot. Despite all of his meticulous, painstaking effort, if he's not careful he will pull the loops too far and have to start all over again.

But when you put YOUR shoes on this morning, you might have tied them while talking to your spouse or your children, or listening to the radio, and never even thinking about what you were doing. A wonderful feature of the way God created us is that, when we do the same thing over and over again, eventually we can do it without even thinking about it. It becomes automatic. It frees our mind up for other, more important things.

That's wonderful until it comes to our worship. Then this "automatic pilot" feature doesn't serve us so well. We find ourselves mumbling through the Lord's Prayer or the Apostle's Creed or the Confession of Sins on Sunday morning automatically. We don't even think about them. Then we become guilty of what Isaiah and Jesus warned about: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (Isaiah 29:13, Matthew 15:9).

What is the problem here?

We might be tempted to blame God for making us this way, but we know that it is wrong to accuse God of evil. God is good to us, and his gifts are good. WE are the ones who sometimes misuse them.

People are often tempted to blame the repetition that takes place in our worship itself. Maybe if we didn't always use the same old order and the same old forms, we wouldn't fall into the trap of not thinking about what we are saying.

But is the problem really with using the Lord's Prayer? Aren't these words that Jesus himself taught us to use in our prayers? And is there really something wrong with the Apostles Creed? Doesn't it simply summarize the main truths of our Christian faith and confess the Gospel of salvation?



The words of Jesus' warning point our attention in another direction--to the human heart. When we come to worship genuinely sorry for our sins, convicted of offending God, convinced that we NEED Jesus, then these words will not seem boring or lifeless, no matter how many times we have used them. The words of our worship service preach the Gospel, which is the antidote for death, and people desperate for the antidote to death are glad to hear them.

Maybe we can even learn to appreciate the repetition. A noted Christian once said that worship is a little like dancing. It helps to know the order, the form well to really enjoy it, to concentrate on the CONTENT without distraction. "As long as you notice, and have to count, the steps, you are not dancing, but only learning to dance." Likewise, in worship, as long as you are always thinking about what is coming next, trying to figure out the tune, concentrating on just saying the words right, you aren't worshipping so much as you are learning how to use these words to worship.

From time to time there will be change in worship forms. God continues to bless his church with people who have the skills to write music and words to praise him just as much today as he did in the days of J.S. Bach or the Reformation or even when David and Solomon were setting up worship in the Temple. But the real change in worship needs to come from our own hearts, and the Gospel of Jesus' love and forgiveness can lead us to "regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it."

In Christ, Pastor Vieths