

The Nature of Unscriptural Worship

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Worship is as natural for mankind as it is to eat and sleep. Like all other conduct of man toward his God, worship must be expressed in the right way to be acceptable to God. This involves the heart completely. No worship, however exact it may be in action and word, is pleasing to God that does not come from the heart. Worship from the heart involves man's intellect, emotion and volition or will. Melodramatic and self-directed worship for the purpose of entertainment is about as fruitless as one trying to grow oranges on a telephone pole. Worship is serious and important in order to have and maintain a proper relationship to God through Jesus Christ the Lord.

Worship springs from the heart, and it expresses gratitude, affection and adoration. Cornelius tried to offer such worship to Peter for coming to his home with the word of salvation, but Peter refused it (Acts 10:25). One worships when he feels great gratitude, awe and fear.

Worship has come to mean different things to different people. For that reason the majority do not take the time to learn the difference between true worship and false worship. All worship that does not conform to God's will in all respects is not scriptural worship.

The Worship of Cain and Abel

The first recorded effort to worship God was by the first two sons of Adam and Eve. "And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto Jehovah. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And Jehovah had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And Jehovah said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shall it not be lifted up? . . . and if thou doest not well, sin coucheth at the door: and unto thee shall be its desire, but do thou rule over it" (Gen. 4:4-7 ASV).

A brief account is given of the sacrifices offered unto Jehovah by the first brothers, Cain and Abel. Details are not given regarding any instruction God gave to these brothers in reference to their sacrifices. However, sufficient evidence is given to determine the contrast in their worship to God. One was accepted and the other rejected. It is proper to conclude that the same requirements were given to both of them alike.

Cain brought the "fruit" of the ground for an offering to Jehovah. That outward gift bespeaks of the inward attitude that offered it.

God was displeased with Cain's sacrifice because it was not by faith (Heb. 11:4). The first murder was provoked by attitudes in worship (Gen. 4:3-8). Abel offered the "firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof" as an offering to Jehovah. He brought the first and best of his flock. Abel offered his sacrifice by faith, and he obtained witness from God that he was righteous (Heb. 11:4; Matt. 23:35; 1 John 3:12). Faith comes from hearing God's word (Rom. 10:17). Abel's sacrifice cost him his life because his brother was angered that God did not accept his sacrifice.

What Is Worship?

Worship is an expression of man to his Creator or to some god for adoration, thanksgiving and praise. When man feels gratitude and reverence for his Maker, he seeks some way to express that unto God.

The Greek authorities define the words which are translated "worship" to mean: *to make obeisance, do reverence to; to revere, stressing the feeling of awe or devotion; an act of homage or reverence; bowing down to, to honor religiously; to serve, to render religious service or homage; to act piously towards.* Henry Thayer says the word for worship is: "to kiss the hand (towards) one, in token of reverence . . . hence in the N.T. by kneeling or prostration to do homage to one or make obeisance, whether in order to express respect or to make supplication" (Thayer, p. 548).

Worship in Spirit and In Truth

Jesus said that those who worship God must worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). In spirit is not enough; in truth is not enough. What one feels in his heart the devotion, praise and reverence for another he must find some method of expressing that feeling. Especially is this so if the object of that devotion is God. The question comes, How shall he express what is in his heart? That is what worship "in spirit and in truth" means.

1. In spirit involves the right attitude. Attitude is essential to scriptural worship. True worship springs from a heart of genuine reverence and respect, with a godly life. God rejected ritual worship void of true devotion. The heart and mind of the worshipers must be involved in the worship or it is rejected (1 Cor. 11:27-30).

Worship must be from of a heart filled with true devotion, piety and sincerity, and in obedience to the will of God. Cornelius had this good attitude when he sent for Peter (Acts 10:33). Christ was an example of submission to the Father (Matt. 3:15; Phil. 2:5-8; Heb. 5:8). Worship is unscriptural when it is contrary to the will of God.

The heart must possess these qualities to have the right attitude: The love of God (1 John 5:3; 2:15; 4:19). Child like humility is characteristic of the spirit of worship (Matt. 18:4; Jas. 4:6; John 13:14; Phil. 2:5-8). The attitude of forgiveness is necessary also to worship God (Matt. 18:21-22; 6:14-15; Acts 7:60). The attitude to sacrifice is essential (Rom. 12:1-2). There must be a willing sacrifice offered with joy and in humility (Phil. 2:5-8).

2. The truth involves how the worshiper expresses that which is in the heart. It means to worship according to the commandments of the Lord in God's word (John 17:17). Worship is the expression of the heart in actions that have been authorized and explained as to who, what, why, how and when worship takes the right action as well as the true attitude of the heart. Worship in the New Testament involves specific, overt acts from the heart to be accepted by God.

Unacceptable Worship

Unscriptural worship permeates the church today across the land. It is very common even among some who call themselves "Christians" and claim to be members of "churches of Christ." Unacceptable worship is caused by:

1. *Worship without divine authority.* All worship without authority from God is not acceptable (Lev. 10:1-2). It is not by faith. In fact, one cannot please God at all without faith (Heb. 11:6). Faith comes by hearing the word of God, and that means to understand the word and obey it. Today there are many who claim to worship God, but they either leave off something God has required, or add something not authorized by God. That is not worship by faith (Heb. 11:4; Gen. 4:4-5). God has declared His will to all nations through Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:1-3). His word is complete (2 Pet. 1:3; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Rom. 1:16).

All we do must be done by the authority from the word of Christ (Col. 3:17). This includes worship. We do not have the liberty to express our devotion to God in any way we please. The Pharisees were condemned because their worship was directed by tradition (Matt. 15:1-9; Mark 7:6-13). That is vain worship. It is lip service, not true devotion from the heart.

God rejected Cain's sacrifice (Gen. 4:5). He rejected Israel's (Amos 5:21-23; Mal. 1:13). He rejected the attitude of the Jews (Matt. 15:8-9). He will reject our worship if it is not in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

The *silence* of God is not authority (1 John 3:4; Matt. 7:21-23). Man has no right or authority to act in worship to God in that which God has said nothing (Heb. 7:14).

Man is forbidden to go beyond what is written (1 Cor. 4:6; 2 John 9). We must speak as the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11).

2. *Worship Idols.* All worship directed toward anything in heaven or on earth besides God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ is unacceptable worship. Anything worshiped other than God is an idol. Idolatry is forbidden in strongest terms (1 John 5:21; Dan. 3:3-7; 2 Kings 10:21,23; Acts 19:35; 15:20; Col. 3:5; Rom. 1:25).

3. *Worship without heart action.* All worship without the acceptable condition and involvement of the heart is unacceptable to God (Matt. 15:8-9). The attitudes of prayer, humility, purpose, love and unselfishness in the heart must be the force that worships God.

4. *Worship by the doctrines of men.* The doctrines of men produce the elements of unacceptable worship. *Ignorant worship:* when the worshiper neither knows whom to worship, nor how to worship. (John 4:22-24; Acts 17:23). *Vain worship:* empty, profitless, authorized by the doctrines of men (Matt. 15:9; Rom. 1:25). *Will worship:* worship directed by the will of the worshiper and not the will of God (Col. 2:23). Unauthorized practices (John 4:24). The worship of angels (Col. 2:18; Rev. 19:10; 22:8).

5. *Unrighteous worshipers.* All worship from those alienated from God is unacceptable worship. Jesus would not accept worship from devils. Worship and service to God go together (Matt. 4:10; Luke 4:8; Rom. 1:25). God has never accepted worship from one whose life was not right (Prov. 15:8; Isa. 1:13-15; Amos 5:21-25). Righteousness is a prerequisite to scriptural worship. True righteousness comes only by obeying the commands of God (Psa. 119:15). The commands of the gospel are righteousness (Rom. 1:16-17). There is a difference between the righteousness of man and the righteousness of God. "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10: 1-3). It means the difference between life and death.

"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem" (Psa. 122:1-2).

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." Matthew 7:21.

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