

The first recorded instance of worship in the Bible is found in the fourth chapter of Genesis. In every age and culture since that event in the early history of humanity there abounds abundance evidence that man has always been a worshipful being. To worship is "to make obeisance, do reverence to."

The Bible reveals that not all worship is acceptable. In Matthew 15:9 Jesus cites the prophet Isaiah's reference to a worship that is vain. Paul speaks in Acts 17:23 of a worship that is ignorant. Even in the first account of worship noted above, Cain's offering was rejected as unacceptable. Hence for worship to be acceptable it must meet certain criteria. In this study we will consider the four essentials of acceptable worship set forth in God's word. Unless all four of these are present our worship will be found wanting.

The Right Object

We begin with the proper object of worship. Throughout history men have worshiped many different objects. Yet the Scriptures reveal only one acceptable object---God. In John 4:24 Christ said: "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." When in the temptations of Jesus Satan asked the Lord to fall down and worship him, he responded by quoting an Old Testament passage, which says: "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve" (Matt. 4: 10).

Such passages clearly exclude the worship of idols. When Paul was describing the idolatry of the Gentiles he condemned them for having "changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man and birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things---who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator"(Rom.1:23,25).

The worship of angels is also prohibited. Though they are beings of glory and splendor who are superior to men, even they are not proper objects of homage. When John was about to worship the angel who had showed

him the things he wrote in Revelation the angel abruptly stopped him with these words: "See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God" (Rev.22:9). If worship is to be acceptable, then God alone must be its object!

The Right Subject

Not only does it matter **whom** is worshiped, but **who** does the worshiping is equally important. The **right** objects being worshiped by the **wrong** subject still results in vain worship. In the New Testament the right subject for acceptable worship is identified with the church of the Lord. In 1 Corinthians 3:16 Paul, in addressing the church, says: "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" The physical temple under the first covenant was the place where God was worshiped. The spiritual temple, the church, under the second or new covenant is the place where God is worshiped today. The spiritual temple or house (1 Pet. 2a) is not a physical building or meetinghouse, but a relationship of the redeemed with God. Only redeemed men who have been called "out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9) are qualified or made fit "to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5).

Notice that in 1 Peter 2:9 "His own special people" are also described as a "royal priesthood" or a "holy priesthood" (vs. 5), which means that each Christian individually is a priest (Rev. 1:6). Under the old covenant it was the Levitical priests who were charged with the conduct of worship, i.e., offering sacrifices in behalf of the people, ministering in the temple, etc. Under the new covenant of Christ every Christian is a priest of God and as such is qualified to offer to Him acceptable worship. For other than a genuine Christian to offer worship to God would be the equivalent of a non-Levite under the law of Moses

entering the temple to minister in the sanctuary.

Even the Christian must remain faithful or he forfeits this right or privilege of worship. Solomon sets forth this principle in Proverbs 28:9: "One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination."

The Right Attitude

The third essential element of acceptable worship is the right attitude on the part of the worshiper. It would be futile to conform outwardly if we have no spirit, no desire to praise. Worship then would merely be ritual without reverence or form without fervor. Jesus put it this way: "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit --" (John 4:24). In Matthew 15:8 Jesus refers to Isaiah's scathing denunciation of Jewish worship in his day and Jesus applies it to his own time. He said: "Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah's prophesy about you, saying: `These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from me' " (emp. mine - FV).

Though Christians should certainly refrain from the excesses and unscriptural behavior of the Pentecostals or Charismatics (knowing that all things are to "be done decently and in order"---1 Cor.14:40), yet at the same time we need to realize that "worship in spirit" cannot be unemotional. We who can get so spirited or show such passion for sports, politics, or a thousand and one other things need to display such feeling in our worship of God!

Read such passages as Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16 and 1 Corinthians 14:15 and take note that one's heart or spirit is to accompany all worship. The apostle Paul warns the Corinthians that if they partake of the Lord's Supper without heart involvement, or as he puts it, "not discerning the Lord's body," that in so doing one "eats and drinks judgment to himself " (1 Cor.11:29). The acceptable worshiper must have the right attitude!

The Right Form

Finally, careful attention must be given to the form worship takes for it to be acceptable. Jesus in John 4:24 not only says that worship must be "in spirit," but concludes with the words "and truth." **The forms or outward expressions of true worship have always been determined by God ---never by man!** A number of years ago Pat Boone recorded a song which said in part: "Me and Jesus have our own thing going." This expressed sentiment is an effort to justify individualism and non-conformity in religion. There is a popular slogan, which says: "Worship God in your own way." What about God's way? He has never left it up to man to decide how he will worship Him, and when man presumes to do so his worship is always rejected. Examples of this are seen in Cain (Gen.4; Heb.11:4), Nadab and Abihu (Lev.10) and king Saul (1 Sam. 13). Each of these evidently thought he and God had their "own thing going" too, but in each case it led to rejection by God. In failing or refusing to do what God requires in worship men repudiate the very essence of worship, viz., showing honor and respect to God! How can men show true reverence for God if in their very worship of Him they ignore or violate His will?

Scriptural worship in this present age takes the following forms or manifests itself in the following expressions: (1) Observance of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor.11:23-34); (2) The preaching and/or study of God's word (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor.14); (3) prayer (1 Cor.14:15; 1 Tim.2:1,8); (4) singing (1 Cor.14:15; Eph.5:19; Col.3:16); and (>) giving of one's means on the first day of the week (1 Cor.16:2). Any other form of worship (whether it be the lighting of candles, the burning of incense, the saying of the Rosary, the use of mechanical instruments of music, etc.) is without divine authority and therefore is not worship "in truth."

The use of instrumental music is the most common example in our day of worship without the right for-in. This has not always been so. In fact until about the last 200 years nearly all

religious groups worshiped without the instrument. Its use has especially proliferated in recent years to the point that some churches now have full orchestras or bands.

However, until the seventh century no instruments were used, at which time they were introduced into worship by Pope Vitalian, and that over protest. At the beginning of the Protestant movement "the early reformers, when they came out of Rome, removed them as monuments of idolatry-. Luther called the organ an ensign of Baal; Calvin said the instrumental music was not to be adopted into the church any more than the incense and candlestick. Knox called the organ a chest of whistles" (McClintock & Strong's Encyclopedia, p.762). John Wesley, founder of Methodism, said, "I have no objection to instruments of music in our chapels, provided they are neither heard nor seen" (Clarke's Commentary, Vol. 4. p.686). Clarke himself was a devout Methodist. These men knew there was no New Testament authority for the instrument---that it was a corruption of true worship.

Conclusion

Remember, acceptable worship involves not some, but all of the following: the right object--God, the right subject--a Christian. the right attitude--"in spirit.", and the right form--"in truth" or according to God's word. May God help us to "offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Pet.2:5).

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Visitors are always welcome!

ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP

By
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**"God is Spirit, and those worship Him must
worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24)**

The Bible Has The Answer!