



Foundations of

FAITH

Acceptable Worship

Lesson 26

Man is a worshipful creature. He has an innate desire to pay homage to a higher power. Yet, without knowledge of the one true God and the worship desired by that God, his worship will not be accepted.

UNACCEPTABLE WORSHIP. There are several kinds of unacceptable worship. Paul mentioned one in his address to the Athenians on Mars' Hill. "You men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore you ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you." (Acts 17:22, 23) While these people had erected an altar to God, they did not know him, and could not please him with their **ignorant worship**.

Jesus once condemned the Pharisees with the words, "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men." (Matt. 15:7-9) The **vain worship** of these Jews consisted in placing their traditions upon a par with the commandments of God. Jesus told them, "Thus have you made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition." (Matt. 15:6) Traditions and customs are not wrong within themselves, but when man makes law out of them, they become sin and void the worship which he offers to his Creator.

In Colossians 2:23 Paul speaks of certain ordinances, "Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of

the body." **Will worship** is that which is self-imposed as distinguished from that which is given by God. If a man says, "I know what the scriptures teach, but I prefer it this way, and I will have it the way I want it," he is guilty of placing his will above that of God. This is what Saul did when he personally offered a sacrifice to God, contrary to the law of Yahweh. (1 Samuel 13) This is what he did when he saved some of the flocks of Amalek to offer to God when the Lord had told him to utterly destroy them. Samuel reproved the king by asking, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen, than the fat of rams." (1 Samuel 15:22) Assuredly, God will not accept our worship if we insist on offering our adoration contrary to instructions.

WHAT IS TRUE WORSHIP? When Jesus once passed through the province of Samaria he stopped to rest at Jacob's well outside the city of Sychar. There he engaged in conversation a Samaritan woman. She soon said, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and you say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." (John 4:19, 20) To both the Jews and Samaritans the place of worship was extremely important, but they could not agree upon the proper locality. The reply of Jesus was designed to show that the place is of little consequence, but that the manner of worship is of great importance. "Jesus said unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour comes, when you shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father ... But the hour comes, and now

is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in **truth.**" (John 4:21, 23, 24)

Acceptable worship, then, is two-fold – it must be in spirit, or with the proper condition of heart. It must also be in truth, or in accordance with the way God has prescribed. Worship which is in spirit, but not in the way that he has ordained, is not pleasing to him. Neither is God satisfied with worship carried out in the right way, but which is devoid of the proper spirit. Acceptable worship requires both the spirit and the truth.

WORSHIPPING IN SPIRIT. There are numerous obstacles to worshipping God in spirit. One is to allow worship to degenerate into a mechanical rite. For example, it is possible for one to eat the Lord's supper while meditating upon other matters than the death of Christ. It is possible to sing hymns with the lips while the heart is far from God. It is possible to say a prayer without actually praying. When we are guilty of these faults, we do not truly worship. A lack of complete consecration is often responsible for this condition. To worship in spirit is to put out of one's mind everything of the world and to completely centre the heart upon things spiritual.

Likewise, self-righteousness can prevent the proper spirit of worship. In Luke 18:9-14 Jesus relates the parable of the two men who went to the temple to pray. The Pharisee used his prayer as a means of boasting. The publican confessed his sin. Jesus states that the tax collector was justified rather than the Pharisee because he had humbled himself. The Pharisee was so filled with self-righteousness that he could not prostrate his heart before the Almighty.

A heart filled with iniquity can also block spiritual worship. In the model prayer Jesus implored, "And forgive us our debt, **as we forgive our debtors.**" Not only will God not forgive our sins if we do not forgive those who wrong us, but it is impossible for us to have the proper state of mind with a heart full of hatred and bitterness. Nor can we expect God to accept our worship if our lives are overflowing with unrepented sins.

Some fail to worship God in spirit because they mistake aesthetic enjoyment for worship. The human emotions are pleased with beautiful music, but the enjoyment of the melodious strains of a spiritual song

do not constitute worship. One may leave the place of worship feeling comforted because of the spiritual atmosphere which he has enjoyed. But while this is most desirable, such a sensation does not of itself constitute worship if it has not been accompanied by a heart in tune with God.

Neither can the proper attitude of worship be found where there is a lack of reverence. We read, "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." (Heb. 12:28) Reverence is the profound respect which we hold for God. It is a condition of heart which expresses itself in our outward demeanour. If in the presence of the dead we maintain solemn silence, can we expect God to be pleased if our worship is filled with whispering and general inattentiveness?

WORSHIPPING IN TRUTH. If men could transport themselves to an assembly of the early Christians, they would be struck by the utter simplicity of their worship. It was without many of the frills which have been attached to worship today. Something of the nature of that worship is described in Acts 2:42: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers."

Mention of the apostles' doctrine implies that teaching was a part of the worship of the early church. The apostles' doctrine in which the Christians in Jerusalem continued is the same doctrine which we possess in the New Testament scriptures. But while that which was taught is specified as being the apostles' doctrine, the form of teaching in the early church varied. Preaching, exhortation, reading of the scriptures, or joint study of the same, all constitute teaching of the apostles' doctrine. However, Paul warns, "Let all things be done unto edifying." (I Cor. 14:26) Any way of teaching which does not profit the church should be discontinued.

The early church continued steadfastly in the breaking of bread or the Lord's supper. This institution was given to remind the worshipper of the death of Jesus Christ and to focus his attention upon the supreme sacrifice offered by the Lord. It will be studied in detail in another lesson.

Prayer also constituted a part of the worship of the first century Christians. That the Jerusalem church continued steadfastly in it simply means that they carried out the injunction, "Pray without ceasing." (I

Thess. 5:17) Of course, prayer should not be limited to public assemblies of worship, but should be a part of the personal life of each individual Christian. This subject will also be studied further in another lesson.

The assemblies of the early Christians were filled with the singing of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, unaccompanied by instruments of music. Paul admonishes, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." (Col. 3:16) Again he adds, "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." (Eph. 5:19) In singing, we exhort one another while at the same time praising God. The emphasis in the scriptures is upon singing from heart, rather than upon the beauty of the harmony. Naturally, the more beautiful the music the easier it will be to sing from the heart, but one should never refrain from singing because he has difficulty in carrying a tune. The intentional omission of music in the worship of the Lord's church may be explained by the fact that the Lord is more interested in that which proceeds from the heart than in any mechanical melody which we might make. While an instrument of music can only make sound, the lips utter meaningful words which are an expression of the heart of the worshipper.

The period of worship was used by the first century disciples as an opportunity to give of their

financial means for the work of the Lord. When Paul took up a collection at Corinth for the needy in Judea he exhorted the Corinthians, "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." (I Cor. 16:2) Again, he wrote, "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give: not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loves a cheerful giver." (II Cor. 9:7) From these two verses three principles of scriptural giving may be derived; we must give as we are prospered, as we purpose in our heart, and cheerfully.

THE DAY OF WORSHIP. While the early Christians gathered for worship as opportunity and need afforded itself, there was one special day of worship. This was the first day of each week, called the Lord's day by John. (Rev. 1:10) It was on this day that Jesus arose from the grave and it is celebrated in his memory. Particularly on this day did Christians meet to eat the Lord's supper (Acts 20:7) And as already noticed they used this day to give according to their prosperity. (I Cor. 16:2) The Lord's day is the first day and should not be confused with the Jewish sabbath which was the seventh day. All Christians should faithfully worship God on this day, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." (Heb. 10:25)

TEST ON LESSON 26

Write true or false after the following statements:

1. All worship is acceptable to God.
2. Jesus condemned the worship of the Pharisees.
3. True worship must be in spirit and in truth.
4. One always worships when he enjoys a worship service.
5. Singing in the early church was without musical accompaniment.
6. The early Christians worshipped on the first day of the week.
7. It is not important for Christians to worship regularly.

List three kinds of unacceptable worship:

1.
2.
3.

Give five obstacles to worshipping in spirit:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

In the blank after each scripture, indicate whether prayer, teaching, giving, singing, or the Lord's Supper is mentioned there:

1. Acts 12:12 and
2. Acts 20:7 and
3. I Corinthians 16:2
4. I Corinthians 14:15 and
5. Acts 20:20
6. I Corinthians 11:20-29
7. Acts 16:25 and

Acceptable Worship

Lesson 26

Answers

These lessons are based on the King James Version, so if you are using another translation the words employed may vary slightly. Sometimes an alternative answer is possible. The following is a useful guide.

Section 1 – F, T, T, F, T, T, F.

Section 2 – Ignorant worship, vain worship, will worship.

Section 3 – Any five of:-

Letting worship become mechanical

Lack of concentration

Self-righteousness

A heart filled with iniquity

Mistaking aesthetic enjoyment for worship

Lack of reverence.

Section 4 -

1. Prayer
2. Lord's supper and teaching
3. Giving
4. Prayer and singing
5. Teaching
6. Lord's supper
7. Prayer and singing.

Enquiries to - graemestudy@gmail.com