

The Church Of The New Testament (Part 6 of 8)

April 2, 2009

The Worship of the Church

All over the land and country, churches will come together to worship. Will all of it be right? Will God accept the worship of every individual, and will it meet with his approval? Can we know what it takes to constitute acceptable worship? What does it mean to worship? And what is the worship of the church? The term "worship," as a verb is defined "to adore, bow down to, deify, exalt, honor, idolize, pray to, and revere." As a noun, it is "an act, or acts of homage, adoration, exaltation and reverence, offered by an individual to one whom he recognizes as his superior."

I suggest that not everybody worships the right object. Not everybody who does worship the right object does it in the right spirit and in the right way, Let us study briefly on these three points: (1) the right object; (2) the right spirit; (3) the right way.

The Right Object of Worship

Jesus taught us most effectively who the right object of worship is. When Satan offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if he would fall down and worship him, Jesus said, "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matthew 4:10). Satan is not the right object of our worship.

Do you remember also when Peter took the gospel to the first Gentile converts, they fell at the feet of the apostle to worship him, but Peter forbade it. The Bible says, "But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man" (Acts 10:26). There are some men on the earth today who would not refuse to be the objects of worship, but no man is a worthy object of worship. The Bible plainly states: "And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven" (Matthew 23:9).

I am not surprised when ordinary men try to worship something other than God, but it is surprising that the dear old apostle John tried on at least one occasion to worship an angel. The angel appeared to John when he was in exile on the Isle of Patmos, and brought before him in panoramic view the ages of time and the unending vastness of eternity. When John had viewed the celestial city, he was so enraptured and so moved by the grandeur and glory of the home of the redeemed souls that he said: "I fell

down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed me these things." But the angel quickly said: "See thou do it not . . . worship God" (Revelation 22:8, 9). God is the only right object of worship.

We may read in the history books of nations whose civilizations have perished that worshipped idols made of gold, silver, wood and marble, bowing down unto those images created by their own fancy. But let us not forget that we are not so far removed from idolatry as we sometimes imagine.

Thousands and millions of people today worship the great goddess of pleasure. Never in the history of man have more people been ready to bow down at her feet than there are today. We are so anxious for the gratification of our physical passions, lusts and desires that we are willing to pay almost any price in order that the goddess of pleasure may smile upon us.

Millions of others are willing to worship the great goddess of fashion. When the goddess of fashion dictates, you and I must bow down and do her bidding or else be ostracized from what the world considers the best element of society. At tremendous cost and terrible expense, we must buy and spend and then discard every article of clothing, which is soon out of date. The influence of the goddess of fashion is even seen in the meeting houses and places of worship in the lives of those who ought to be simple and humble worshippers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today the god of mammon wields his influence and authority over thousands, and even millions of the sons and daughters of men. Some of us are willing to pay any price and make any sacrifice - truthfulness, honesty, uprightness, purity, chastity, even the virtues of manhood and womanhood - in order to receive the blessings of the god of mammon. Therefore, I say that it is not enough merely to worship. We should recognize that only the true God of heaven, Jehovah God, is to be the object of our worship.

Let me also remind you that it is not enough to worship the true God of heaven. I must also know and be assured that the very act of worship rendered is the one demanded by Jehovah God, because I recall that the Savior stated that the Pharisees of his day were worshipping God in vain. The Pharisees found fault with the disciples of Jesus because they sat down and ate without washing their hands. The Pharisees never did that. They washed their hands as a religious rite and ceremony. Jesus said of the Pharisees: "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 me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:8, 9).

Vain Worship

Jesus said the Pharisees worshipped the right object, but what kind of worship was it? Jesus said it was "vain" worship. What does the word "vain" mean? It means "empty, unsuccessful, fruitless; of no value or merit." Therefore, their worship was empty and fruitless and without the approval of God. Why? Because they taught "for doctrines the commandments of men." It is possible to worship the right object, and yet that worship be empty, fruitless, and unacceptable.

Ignorant Worship

Let me remind you that it is also possible to worship the true God, the right object ignorantly. Do you remember that when Paul went to the city of Athens, a city noted for its scholars, the classical center of the world, where lived the students of Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle, he said to them: "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious" (Acts 17:22). Why did he say that? "For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, I declare I unto you" (Acts 17:23).

Think about it! Here were some of the greatest scholars and philosophers of the day, and yet they were worshipping God ignorantly. That certainly shows that a man might be a scholar of the classics, and might have a dozen degrees from the highest institutions of learning in the land and still be ignorant about how to worship the true God of heaven. It is not unlikely that a humble farmer could explain how to worship God acceptably better than a great scholar or professor! If it were possible to worship God ignorantly back then, don't you think it is possible today?

In the book of John, Jesus stated in the plainest terms possible what it takes to constitute worship that is acceptable to God. He said: "But the hour cometh, 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 4:23, 24).

The Right Spirit of Worship

If you intend to worship God today, how do you know that worship will be right? How do you know that God will accept it, and how do you know it will meet with his approval? Jesus stated that we must have the right object - God. Jesus stated that we must have the right motive - in spirit.

And Jesus stated that we must do it in the right way - in truth. Let us examine the motive, the right spirit.

I am certain that we can see the importance of the right spirit. It is entirely possible that a person might offer any act of worship that God demands, and it might be absolutely in truth; he might offer that worship to the right object, the God of heaven, but if he does not offer it in the right spirit, that is, with the proper motive and prompting of heart, it is only an empty form - a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. I am convinced that a congregation of worshippers might have the Lord's table, arranged exactly as God has commanded in his word, but the apostle Paul said: "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (1 Corinthians 11:29). Therefore, Jesus said it is absolutely obligatory that we worship God "in spirit."

The Right Way of Worship

But Jesus stated another requirement of acceptable worship when he said our worship must be "in truth" (John 4:24). Even if we have the right object, and have the right spirit, and the right motive back of it, unless it is in harmony with God's truth, it is not acceptable worship. That leads me to say this: There can be no act of worship acceptable to the God of heaven, unless he has commanded that specific act to be done. The thing that we offer to God may seem all right to us. It might be that the thing is harmless in itself, but unless God authorizes it, you and I have no right to offer it to him, because he would be insulted by our presumption.

It all goes back to the question: Who is to be pleased in our worship? If I am the one to be pleased, then whatever meets my approval will be acceptable, but if God is to be pleased, then we must find out what God has commanded along this line. If man in general is to be pleased, then anything that meets with popular approval would be proper. But, since my object is to worship God, then I want to find out what will please him, and merit his approval. It is not a question of what I would like and what meets my approval, but what will meet the approval of God. What does God want? How do we know what God wants? How do I know whether God wants me to sing or not? How do I know that God wants prayer offered as an act of worship? The only way I know what God wants in worship, is by what he has told me in his word. When God has said, "I want this, or that," then that is the end of all controversy. What has God commanded?

Prayer

We know that one act of Christian worship is prayer. How do I know that? When we investigate the worship of the early church, which is our

example, we learn that they offered prayers (Acts 2:42). The New Testament states further: "I will therefore than men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" (I Timothy 2:8). Again: "I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also" (I Corinthians 14:15). Jesus said: "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking" (Matthew 6:7). Therefore, when the church comes together to worship, men are to lead the prayers, speaking one at a time, with the women keeping silent, and with every heart attuned to God's throne.

Communion

I learn also that the Lord's Supper is to be observed on the first day of the week, because the early disciples "came together" for this purpose (Acts 20:7). It was something in which they "continued steadfastly," (Acts 2:42). The "breaking of bread" was the communion (I Corinthians 10:16). What are the elements of the Lord's Supper? When Jesus instituted it, he took a loaf of unleavened bread, according to Matthew 26:26 (ASV), commanding the disciples: "Take, eat; this is my body." Since Jesus had only one body, he took only one loaf of bread. Jesus also took "a cup," (Matthew 26:27; Mark 14:23), and commanded: "Drink ye all of it" (Matthew 26:27). They obeyed, for the Bible says: "He gave it to them: and they all drank of it" (Mark 14:23). This cup contained the fruit of the vine, (Matthew 26:29). The apostle Paul praised the Corinthians for keeping the ordinances "as I delivered them to you" (I Corinthians 11:2). We cannot set aside the divine pattern and employ a multiplicity of loaves and cups on the Lord's table. We must worship "in truth," and that means according to the divine pattern in God's word.

Giving

But I also learn that the fellowship or the contribution is an act of worship to God. According to Acts 2:42, this was another act of worship in which the early church "continued steadfastly." What about our giving, or contributions? What does God command? Of course it must be directed toward God. It must be done with a cheerful heart and with the right spirit. But what has God specified as to the time and the amount? The Bible says: "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. 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 Corinthians 16:1, 2). We are to contribute on the first day of the week, and as we have been prospered.

Singing

But, again, no one questions the fact that singing is to be a part of Christian worship. The reason is because God has commanded it in his word. Nine times in the New Testament, I can read singing in connection with the worship of God; however, the New Testament nowhere mentions instrumental music in the worship of the church. The songs we sing are to be "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" according to Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. Therefore, when we sing spiritual songs with the spirit and understanding, we have the assurance that we have met the approval of God.

Teaching

So far, we have paid attention to prayers, the communion, the contribution, and the singing, but I learn that another thing characterized the worship of the early church, and that was the "apostles' doctrine," (Acts 2:42). That means the teaching of the apostles. Part of our time in worship is to be occupied in teaching the word of God. But, how should it be taught?

Some people have the opinion that the church was not given any method of teaching, and that we are at liberty to use any method, but let us look again into the divine will for the truth. The apostle Paul delivered instructions for us to obtain "when ye come together" (I Corinthians 14:26). These instructions were to apply whenever and wherever the church came together. (1) Those who spoke in foreign languages were to speak by course. Paul said, "If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course" (I Corinthians 14:27). (2) The prophets were to speak "one by one, that all may learn and all may be comforted." (I Corinthians 14:31).

The reasons given for having one speak at a time were: (1) that all may learn and be comforted, (I Corinthians 14:31), and (2) God is not the author of confusion, (I Corinthians 14:33). There was no dividing into classes for the teaching in the New Testament church, because this was the whole church having "come together into one place" (I Corinthians 14:23). When Jesus taught the word of God, they did not divide into classes, for the Bible tells us of his teaching on one occasion. "He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read" (Luke 4:16), and "the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him" (Luke 4:20). Out of 100 references to teaching in the first five books of the New Testament, not one teaches classifying according to age, sex, or I. Q. by either command, example, inference, or statement.

Who should teach? Paul placed this responsibility upon "faithful men" (II Timothy 2:2). On the other hand, the women are to "learn in silence with

all subjection" (I Timothy 2:11). Paul said: "But I suffer not a woman to teach nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (I Timothy 2:12). The woman is forbidden to occupy the office of a teacher, for Paul said: "It is a shame for women to speak in the church" (I Corinthians 14:35).

Why can't we just do those things that the Bible demands? Why does any man or woman want to argue or take a chance or presume that some other thing or some other way will do?

By Johnny Elmore, Used By Permission.