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Acceptable Worship - #1

by Mark J. Ward

The Bible has many lessons for us to learn from. We can benefit from looking at both good examples and bad examples. Romans 15:4 teaches us that the things that were written before were written for our learning that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. John 4:24 teaches us that we are to worship God "in spirit and in truth". Let us look in this article to what constitutes "acceptable worship" today.

UNACCEPTABLE WORSHIP

The fact that we want to learn what "acceptable" worship is, implies that there is worship that is "unacceptable". The problem of unacceptable worship has been with us since the early days of man. We can read of *unacceptable worship* unto God all throughout the Bible. Please notice the following few examples:

Cain's worship was unacceptable. Please notice the account in Genesis 4:3, "*And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. 4 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: 5 But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. 6 And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? 7 If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.*" Also, note what is stated in Hebrews 11:4, "*By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.*"

Nadab and Abihu's worship was unacceptable. In Leviticus 10:1, the Bible says, "*And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. 2 And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.*"

Notice in the above examples, there was a **departure** from God's instruction on the matter of acceptable worship. Even if Cain and Nadab and Abihu all had "good intentions", note that the result was still "unacceptable worship"!

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Times of Services

Sundays - 2:00 pm Bible class, 3:00 pm Assembly Wednesdays - 6:30 pm Bible class

Acceptable Worship - #1 (continued)

Jesus taught that unacceptable worship in Matthew 15:9 was "vain". Please note the text of Matthew 15:7-9, "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, 8 This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. 9 But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." When some of the Jews of Jesus' day substituted *commandments of men* for *the doctrine of God*, their worship was vain, or empty. This constituted *unacceptable worship* like the previous examples we have examined.

The Corinthians' worship was unacceptable in I Corinthians 11:17-34. Paul said in verse 20 that they were eating another Supper, one not the Lord's Supper (thus, *unacceptable worship*)! We can do the same thing today in our worship unto God. The careful Bible student will realize that they were NOT rebuked for taking the Supper on the *wrong day*, or taking the *wrong elements* (although such would also be *unacceptable*), but rather they were rebuked for not waiting and eating together and for eating in such a way as to satisfy hunger and thirst (as would be the case in a common meal at home). This example of unacceptable worship indicates that there can be *multiple requirements* by God regarding our worship unto Him and in order to be *acceptable* in our worship, we have to get them "all" right.

ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP INCLUDES...

The proper "object" of our worship is the Godhead.

Consider that *only* the Father, Jesus Christ our Lord, and the Holy Spirit are worthy of our worship (Mt. 4:10; Acts 17:22-30; Acts 10:25,26; Acts 5:1-4; John 1:1-14; Rom. 1:20). There is no New Testament authority for worshipping man, nature, animals, birds or any graven image (2 John 9).

The proper "spirit" of man is essential for acceptable worship.

As we think in our hearts, so we are (Prov. 23:7; Mt. 6:21). Acceptable worship that is "in spirit" is worship that is *from the heart*, earnestly putting ourselves into our actions and concentrating on spiritual things (and not letting our minds wander from the worship activities as we engage in them). We are not "going through the motions" when worshipping "in spirit", but rather from a pure and honest heart are having spiritual communion with the Godhead above and with faithful brethren here on earth (i.e. thus having both vertical *and* horizaontal fellowship/communion).

Engaging in worship that is "by faith" is also part of acceptable worship.

Since "...*faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*" (Romans 10:17), our worship must be according to *the pattern* revealed in the New Testament for acceptable worship. In order to do something "by faith", we must look to what God said on the subject and stay within the parameters of His authority (whether specific authority, which is exclusive, or generic authority, which is inclusive).

The "sum" of God's Word is the truth on any given subject. When we add it all up, rightly dividing it, we come to the answer God wishes for us to have. Let us all examine our worship to God, whether in or out of assemblies of the local church, to make sure that it is acceptable worship. God is truly honored when our worship is "in spirit and in truth". In future articles, Lord willing, we will continue this study of *acceptable worship*. Thanks for reading. mjl

Editor's Note: If you would like a Home Bible Study in the privacy of your home, or would like to study further over the phone, or by computer (email), please feel free to contact us: Mark J. Ward, 445 Touchstone Parkway, Brunswick, Georgia 31525, (912) 265-6936 - markjward@yahoo.com

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Romans 16:16 "...the churches of Christ salute you."
