

Rise Up And Build

"So They said, 'Let us rise up and build,' Then they set their hands to do this good work," Neh. 2:18

January 17, 2021

What Constitutes Acceptable Worship?

By Everett Hardin

One of the distinctive features of the New Testament church is its worship. The necessity of worshipping God is conceded, but how shall we worship is usually considered of little importance. Man is by nature a creature of worship. He may not worship the right object or in the right way, but he will worship, nevertheless.

Worship is not simply the performance of certain acts. It is something that takes place in the heart—"the adoring reverence of the human spirit for the divine." Before there can be any true worship, therefore, the emotions must be aroused. That is done by the knowledge of who and what God is and what He has done for us. When we have proper feelings toward God, it always seeks an outward expression. Before one can worship God intelligently, and therefore acceptably, he must know something of His character and what will please Him. True worship involves praise, prayer, adoration, and thanksgiving.

Essential Conditions

Jesus said, "*God is a spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth,*" John 4:24. The term "*must*" is exclusive. There is no alternative, no personal choice, it must be of a certain nature.

God is the right Object of our worship. The conditions of worship are such that the worshipper becomes like the object he worships. Therefore, the idea that man forms of God will have much to do with the development of his own character. In the religious world today people offer worship unto the so-called "saints." They worship the mother of Jesus. They prostrate themselves before idols. They pay homage to a man they believe to be the vicar of Christ upon the earth. But the Bible teaches plainly that only

God is to be worshipped. *“Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device,”* Acts 17:29.

Acceptable worship must be *“in spirit.”* Spiritual worship is sincere, not formal, not indifferent. Such worship is opposed to the carnal modes of worship of the pagans and even the Jewish system that pertained largely to the flesh (Heb. 9:13). Christ taught there would be no more earthly temples, animal sacrifices, material altars, no feast days, no incense or other items made by man’s hands. Now it is a spiritual worship that includes a spiritual sense of the Object worshipped and a spiritual communion with Him.

The church is the spiritual temple. *“Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone,”* Eph. 2:20. Together Christians form a spiritual house. *“Ye also as lively stones are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ,”* I Pet. 2:5. All Christians are priests authorized to engage in the worship of God. The sacrifices which the priesthood offers is described as *“spiritual”* to distinguish them from the sacrifices required by the Law of Moses. Paul spoke of serving God, in his spirit, Rom. 1:9. We are to dedicate ourselves to intense prayer with sincere hearts. *“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit,”* Eph. 6:18. We must present our *“bodies as living sacrifices, holy, acceptable unto God, which is our spiritual service,”* Rom. 12:1

To worship God in spirit involves the deepest emotions of the heart. Yet this is not mere animal excitement or sensationalism. It requires no gimmickry, no mystic effects of special lighting, no images or crosses. Such gimmicks betray a search for a “cheap spirituality.” God’s word must pass through the intelligence of man’s mind before the emotions can respond to its appeal.

True worship is regulated and guided by God’s truth. The Word of God is truth. *“Sanctify them through thy truth; thy **word** is truth,”* John 17:17. We must be guided by the truth and thus free from false conceptions resulting from imperfect knowledge. The worship includes a truthful concept of the object worshipped. This truthful conception can only be gained by learning the truth. Therefore, our worship must be found in the Book of God in order to be truth. *“If you continue in **my word**, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free,”* John 8:31,32.

Our worship must be in truth as contrasted with all forms of idolatry and paganism. But it must also be *“in truth”* in contrast to the various forms of Protestant, Catholic, and cultural worship that have originated with men. Jesus declares that worship based upon man’s traditions is vain. *“**In vain** they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men,”* Matt. 15:9. This principle, if recognized and applied, would do away with many human inventions in worship. The religious observance of holy days such as Easter and Christmas would be laid aside. Men would no longer burn incense, light candles, use holy water, make the sign of the cross, count beads, kneel before “sacred” images or pray before “holy” relics. The Lord’s Supper would be a simple memorial, not a mass, nor a transubstantiation. No instrument of music other than the human heart will be used in worship.

Many things are personal privileges at home, in society, or state, that would be sinful as a part of worship. The pattern for the tabernacle, worship and all came from heaven. *“Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle, for See, saith he, that thou make all things according to **the pattern** shewed to thee in the mount,”* Heb. 8:3. Nadab and Abihu lost their lives for adding to the worship (Lev. 10:1-10). In Ezekiel 22:36, the priests were condemned because they *“put no difference between the holy and the profane.”* In Col. 2: 20-23, Paul condemned *“will worship,”* which means “self-devised” worship. True worship is God given.

A thing is not right in worship just because it is right in the home. Beefsteak on the home table is right, on the Lord’s table it is wrong. A lack of authority makes its use in worship a sin. Patriotic and love songs are right on occasions in the home, but mixed with *“psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs”* in worship; would be sinful. Paul reproved the church at Corinth by saying: *“If any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation,”* I Cor. 11:14. He showed that common meals at home are right, but sinful when made a religious feast or mixed with the Lord’s Supper. Let us remember that the home and the church are different institutions.

Two Dangerous Extremes

There is the danger of drifting into cold, lifeless, formalistic, ritualistic worship. Our worship can be scripturally correct in form but spiritless and dead. We can unconsciously slip into a ritualistic, formalistic worship with hardly a serious thought or moment of consecration. Worship is not a heartless affair of watching others perform. It is a personal spiritual involvement in all activities of worship. Every child of God is to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God. We are not just spectators!

Another extreme is that of emotionalism, with no regard for the authority of the Scriptures. This is from the heart, perhaps, but wrong by transgressing God’s word. *“Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus,”* Col. 3:17. This covers every aspect of our lives, both **word** and **deed**.

The truth can be found between these two extremes. We need to be more spiritual in worship; for the good of our own souls and to remove the stumbling block that may drive others to the opposite extreme. But at the same time let us recognize that unadulterated New Testament worship is based upon a *“thus saith the Lord.”* The “doctrines of men” in worship invariably lead to sinful practices. No man can accept such and remain true to God; it is vain to attempt it.
