

UNACCEPTABLE WORSHIP

In the fourth chapter of the Gospel of John, there is a conversation recorded which took place between Jesus and a Samaritan woman. When the woman came to understand that Jesus was a man of God she asked him whether one should worship on Mt. Gerazmi or in Jerusalem. Jesus replied to her question in John 4:23,24. Our Lord said: "An hour is coming and now is when the true worshipper will worship the Father in spirit and truth for such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers. God is a Spirit, and those who worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth." Jesus declares that God seeks worshippers He desires man to worship and revere him. However, the text indicates that God wants only^a certain kind of worshipper. The Father only desires those worshippers who approach him in spirit and in truth. In fact, notice the absolute nature of Jesus' pronouncement in John 4:24. He said: "God is a Spirit; and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." If we are to worship God in any acceptable manner, we must worship him in Spirit and in truth. But what does that mean? In order to understand what worshipping in Spirit and in truth is, let us consider what it is not.

First, acceptable worship is not ignorant worship. In Acts 17 the apostle Paul visits the city of Athens, and while there he notices the many altars to respective gods. In particular, however, one altar catches his attention. That altar said: "To the Unknown God." As Paul begins to preach he calls this altar to the attention of the Athenians, and in verse 23 of Acts 17 Paul declares: "What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you." Those in Athens had been worshipping the Creator of Heaven and Earth in total ignorance and this was clearly unacceptable to God. In verse 30 of the same chapter the apostle proclaims that God having overlooked the past times of ignorance now declares to men that all men everywhere should repent. God does not accept ignorant worship and men should repent of their ignorance. Worshipping God, therefore, presupposes some knowledge of God. We can not worship what we do not know. It is not good enough to set up an altar to the unknown God. Such worship God does not accept. He desires worshippers who worship according to knowledge, not those who worship in their ignorance.

Second, if we are to please God in our worship of him, we must not perform what the apostle Paul called "will worship." In Colossians 2:20 the apostle rebukes those Colossians who are still living according to worldly principles. In verse 22, he says that they are in effect living according to the commandments and teachings of men. "Which things," Paul continues in verse 23, "have the appearance of wisdom but are will worship." Though the principles of the world which are based upon the teachings of men, not God seem wise, to follow after them is "will worship." But what does "will worship" mean?

Will worship is worshipping God according to the desire of your own will and not God's. Will worship is self-made religion. It is the practice of Christianity on the basis of your own desires and feelings instead of on the basis of God's revealed will. Whenever we attempt to improve on God's will for the worship of the Church, then we set ourselves up as wiser than God, and who is wise than the Almighty? Anyone who seeks to worship God on the basis of his own will, his own feelings and his own desires, will worship in vain. For God does not accept the worship of men which is based on the will of men, but he only accepts those who worship him in spirit and in truth.

Our third point is similar to our second. It is that God will not accept the worship of anyone who does not have proper authority for the manner in which he worships. Our Lord Jesus makes this quite plain in Matthew 15:8,9. There Christ says: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far away from me. But in vain do they worship me teaching as their doctrine the precepts of men." We worship God in vain if we worship him upon the authority of man's teaching. The doctrines and traditions of men can not serve as proper authority in our worship for if we substitute the traditions of men in the place of the commandments of God we have made ourselves wiser than God. We do, as Jesus said in Mark 7:9, "set aside the commandments of God in order to keep our traditions." God cannot be properly worshipped if we worship on the basis of what men have said. It is God we worship, and therefore, it is God who decides how he is to be worshipped. In Colossians 3:17 the apostle Paul declares that whatever we do in word or deed, that is whatever we teach or practice, we must do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. To do something in the name of someone is to do it by his authority. Therefore, whatever we teach or practice in our Christian worship must be based upon the authority of Jesus Christ, not upon the authority of men. To worship God in any other way is to worship Him in vain.

Lastly, one cannot worship God acceptably if he has an evil heart. Jesus declared this in Matthew 15:8,9 where he said: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me teaching as their doctrine the precepts of men." Sin separates man and God, and one cannot worship God in any acceptable manner if he willingly holds sin in his heart. The Father will not accept the worship of a hypocrite.

One of the most important aspects of Christianity is the worship of God. Yet there are acceptable and unacceptable ways of worshipping the Father. This morning we have discussed some of the unacceptable ways of worship. This testifies to the fact that one cannot worship God anyway he pleases. There is a way in which God wishes to be worshipped, and there are ways in which He does not wish to be worshipped. As Jesus said in John 4:24: "God is a Spirit and those who worship him, must worship him in Spirit and in truth."

ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP

In John 4:23,24, Our Lord when speaking with the Samaritan woman declared that "an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for such people the Father seeks to be his worshippers. God is Spirit; and those who worship Him must worship him in spirit and in truth." God himself describes the manner in which he must be worshipped. The Father seeks only such worshippers who worship him in spirit and in truth. There is, then, a definite manner in which God must be worshipped. There is a right way and a wrong way. Last week we discussed some of the unacceptable ways, and this morning we want to provide a framework for the Biblical way in worshipping God.

But someone says, "Mr. Hicks, it is not important as to how we worship." Do you mean to tell me that Jesus Christ came into this world, and then went away, and made no provisions for the worship of himself and God? Do you mean that he gave no instructions about how to worship? Certainly not, Jesus affirmed that we must worship God in Spirit and in truth. We are not able to do as we please, for just as God gave Moses and the people of Israel specific orders concerning worship, so God has given specific instructions to us in the New Testament.

In Hebrews 8:5, we read about Moses going up on the mount to receive the ten commandments. The writer records that God told Moses to "make all things according to the pattern that was showed you on the mount." God gave Moses a pattern and he was to follow the pattern in every detail. When Israel worshipped God, they worshipped him according to this pattern that was given to Moses. They had a pattern for the worship of God.

Their worship was carried on in harmony with the expressed will of their heavenly Father.

Then, we read in the next chapter, Hebrew 9:1, these words: "Now also the first covenant had ordinances of divine service." This clearly implies that just as the Old covenant had some ordinances of worship, so also the New Covenant. In other words, when we meet for worship, as many will meet this morning, God has ordained that which we are to do. God has directed us to do certain things, we cannot decide for ourselves. When we meet on the Lord's day to worship God, we must follow the pattern God has given us. We have specific ordinances of divine service to perform just as the Old Testament, we have a pattern for worship and that pattern is laid down in the New Testament. All we need to do is pick up the Book of God and read and see how Christians worshipped in that far distant day. In this way, we may know how the children of God must worship today.

In order that you might appreciate this, I call your attention back to John 4:23,24 where the rule by which we worship or the standard of true worship is presented. The Bible says: "God is Spirit; and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." We must worship God in spirit and in truth, we do not have any choice in the matter. God has already decided how we should worship, and we dare not change his standard lest we make ourselves out to be wiser than the Almighty himself.

In John 4:24, there are three basic principles laid down for us which should form a basis for our worship of God today.

First, God is the object of our worship. We have no right to bow down to any man, even to the blessed apostle Peter. When he came to the house of Cornelius, the record of which we find in Acts 10, Cornelius fell down at his feet and Peter said, "Stand up; I myself also am a man." (Acts 10:26). How unlike the man today who claims to stand in the room of Peter! You cannot go in his presence unless you bow down; and you could not have gone in to Peter's presence if you did bow down. Peter would not let Cornelius bow to him. He said, "Stand up, do not bow down in my presence!" But the Pope of Rome says, "If you do not bow in my presence you cannot come in." Thus you can see the difference between Peter and the Pope. But God is the object of our worship, not Mary as some do. We are not to "Hail Mary." The Bible says that when you pray, say, "Our Father who art in heaven," and not "Hail Mary." We are to call upon God and not Mary. God is the object of our worship and if we worship anyone else, we offer unacceptable worship.

Second, we must worship God in Spirit and in truth. Spirit here does not refer to the Holy Spirit, but to our spirit, that is, to our attitude in worship. Our worship should be in such a manner as to show reverence and respect for Jesus and his Father. In Romans 1:9, Paul says that he serves God in his spirit. Further in Philippians 3:3, he writes that the true circumscion are those who "worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus." If we do not approach God in a Spirit worthy of the Father, that is, in reverence and awe, then we worship God unacceptably.

Third, we must not only worship God in Spirit, but we must also worship him in truth. In John 17:17, Jesus ~~prays~~ *also*

the Father to sanctify his apostles in the truth, and Jesus adds, "Thy word is truth." Thus, in John 4:24 when Jesus affirms that we must worship God in truth, he means that we must worship God according to his will, according to his word. In Matthew 15:9, Jesus argued that the worship offered by the Pharisees of his day was in vain because they taught as doctrine the commandments of men. We cannot approach God on the basis of what man teach, we can only worship God by following the pattern of worship outlined in his word, that is, in the New Testament. So for worship to be acceptable, it must be offered to God in the right spirit and it must comply with New Testament law. If it does not comply with New Testament law, then it is not acceptable worship.

But what does the New Testament teach concerning the worship of God? What has God ordained should be practiced by the church of the New Testament in their worship of him? Over the next few weeks we will be discussing the pattern God has set down in the New Testament for worship. However, to introduce us to some of the specific acts of worship in the New Testament, let us consider five actions which are associated with the worship of God by the Christian assemblies of the first century.

When the Christians of the New Testament met on the first day of the week, they uniformly performed certain actions which constituted worship to God. The New Testament indicates that in all there were five such acts which characterized all the assemblies of the church on the first day of the week.

First of all, the New Testament teaches that when the disciples came together on the first day of the week, that on that occasion they partook of the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7). This they did every first day of the week. Second, the New Testament teaches that when the saints assembled singing songs of praise and thanksgiving were an integral part of the worship (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). This singing was done without the aid of instruments of music. Third, when the saints assembled together in the first century, there was always a time for prayer. As Paul wrote in I Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray without ceasing." Fourth, preaching or teaching also constituted a major part of the worship of the saints. In every assembly there was always the preaching of Christ and the study of his word (Acts 20:7; I Timothy 4:13). Lastly, according to I Corinthians 16:1,2 when the saints gathered together to break bread every first day of the week, they were also to take that occasion to financially aid the church by giving of what God had prospered them during the week.

These five acts of worship, the Lord's Supper, singing, praying, teaching and giving were all aspects of the worship of God by the saints of the New Testament. These acts of worship constitute a pattern for us to follow, that we might worship God not only with the proper attitude, but also in the proper way; that we might worship God in spirit and in truth. In the following weeks we will be examining each of these acts of worship, with view to restoring the New Testament pattern for worship in the churches of the twentieth century.

SABBATH OR THE LORD'S DAY? (I)

The past two weeks we have considered some acceptable and unacceptable ways of worship. We observed that God only accepts the worship of those who approach him in Spirit and in truth (John 4:24). While it is clear that we must worship God, there exists much religious confusion in the world concerning the day on which Christians should meet for worship. Now it is true that every individual Christian should worship God every day, but the Lord has specified that Christians should meet together on occasions (Hebrews 10:25). The question before us this morning is whether or not there is any specific day upon which Christians must meet, and if there is, what is that day?

Usually all concede that Christians should meet together at least once a week and that that day of the week is specified in Scripture. The point of controversy comes when we attempt to determine that day. Some argue that Christians are required to worship God every Sabbath day, that is, on the seventh day of the week. Others argue that Christians should meet every Sunday, that is, the first day of the week. Are we, then, as Christians required to meet on the seventh day or the first? On Saturday or Sunday? The question, of course, can only be decided by God's holy Word.

The Sabbatarians would have us believe that the Christian is obligated to observe the Old Testament Sabbath, and upon that day Christians are to meet together to worship the Lord. However, such a view reveals a basic misunderstanding of the Jewish Sabbath. The Sabbath day observance, in the Old Testament was designed only for the Jewish nation, as a national sign between God and them. Notice carefully how Exodus 31:3 teaches

this very point. The Lord tells Moses "to say this to the children of Israel: "You shall observe My sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you." Also notice the beginning of verse 17 of the 31st chapter of Exodus. Concerning the Sabbath, the Lord says to Israel: "It is a sign between me and the sons of Israel forever." The Sabbath was given as a particular sign between God and Israel as a nation. It was a national sign of the Jewish nation. The prophet Ezekiel remphasizes this in Ezekiel 20:12 where God speaks through the prophet, saying: "And also I gave them My sabbaths to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them." Thus, the Sabbath was intended as a sign between God and Israel, not between God and mankind in general. The Sabbath was designed to be a reminder to Israel of the mighty works of God. In Deuteronomy 5:15 Moses recounts how God brought Israel out of Egyptian bondage and how he saved them with a mighty hand. Then, Moses draws the following conclusion on the basis of God's work, he says: "therefore, the Lord your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day." The reason, then, that Israel was to keep the sabbath was because God had brought them out of Egypt. It stands to reason that only those whom God brought out of Egypt are obligated to observe the Sabbath. The Sabbath was given only to the children of Israel, designed to be a reminder to Israel that God had brought them out of Egypt. Thus, it constituted a sign between the God and his people in the Old Testament. It was only a national sign for a national people.

But the Sabbatarian objects that God sanctified the Sabbath day in Genesis 2:2,3 and that it has been observed since the time of creation. However, Genesis 2:3 does not state when the sabbath was set apart. We must remember that Moses was writing to his fellow Jews many years after the fact, after they had been brought out of Egypt and given the Sabbath. Genesis 2:2 states that God rested on the 7th day of the creation week. Genesis 2:3 records that God after having rested, blessed and sanctified the 7th day. Thus, it was sometime after God had actually ceased from his creative activity. The Sabbath was not sanctified on the day on which God rested, but subsequent to that event. Yet, the text does not tell us when he did sanctify it, merely that after he rested, he did sanctify it. Therefore, we must turn to other passages of Scripture to determine when the Sabbath day was first commanded and observed.

Assuming that the Sabbatarian is correct, we would expect to find Adam, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob observing the Sabbath, or at least mentioning it. However, from Genesis 3 to Exodus 1, we find no mention of the sabbath at all. We find no one commanded to keep the Sabbath, and neither do we find anyone actually observing it, nor do we find anyone being punished for not keeping it. It is not until Israel is brought out of Egypt that anyone is explicitly commanded to keep the Sabbath, and there it is declared to be a sign only between Israel and God. In fact, the covenant which God made with Israel, which included as its central injunction to keep the sabbath was not made with the Patriarchs. In Deuteronomy 5:3, Moses says: "The Lord did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, with

all those of us alive here today." The Sabbath, therefore, was not a patriarchal institution. The seventh day was not observed as a sabbath by men until Israel was delivered out of the bondage of Egypt.

The Sabbatarian, however, objects that in Exodus 31:17 the sabbath is made a sign "forever." Thus, it is a commandment that was never to end. However, this would not prove that Christians ought to observe the Sabbath, for it was a sign between God and Israel forever, not mankind and God. But "forever" does not always mean endless, rather it only refers to a certain period of time or an age because Johnah, for instance, stated that he was in the belly of a great fish forever (Jonah 2:16). Also other Old Testament institutions such as animal sacrifices and circumcision are said to be everlasting or forever, but no one denies that these ended. Therefore, Exodus 31:17 does not necessarily mean that the Sabbath will never end, We must go to other Scriptures to determine whether or not it ever did end.

In the books of Amos and Hosea there are two specific prophecies concerning the Sabbath, and they prophesy that that the Sabbath will in some future time cease to function as an ordinance of God to the people of God. In Amos 8, the Lord approaches the prophet and says in verse 2: "The end has come upon my people Israel." The prophet then asks when the end will come by phrasing his question in this manner. He asks in verse 5: "When will the new moon be over, so that we may buy grain, and the sabbath, that we may open the wheat market?" Thus, Amos equates the end of Israel with the end of the Sabbath. He wants to know when the Sabbath will be over. The Lord answers his question in Amos 8:9. He says: "And it will come about in that day," declares the Lord God, "that I shall make the sun

go down at noon and make the earth dark in broad daylight." That day is evidently the day died on the cross for at high noon which was the sixth hour of the day darkness enveloped the earth (Matthew 27:45). When Christ died, Israel as an elect and chosen nation ceased, and with it the Sabbath also.

Further, in Hosea 2:11 the Lord promises the prophet that he will "also put an end to all her gaiety, her feasts, her new moons, her sabbaths, and all her festal assemblies." Feast days were annual events, the new moons monthly and the Sabbaths weekly. Hosea declared through the Lord, that they would all cease. Therefore, the Sabbath was not an eternal commandment, rather it was vitally linked with the existence of Israel itself, so that when Israel ceased, the Sabbath did as well. The apostle Paul alludes to this passage in Colossians 2:14-16 and proclaims that the sabbath was merely a shadow of things to come in Christ and that no Christian is obligated to keep the Sabbath in the new age of Christ. The ordinances of the Old Testament, the apostle writes, were nailed to the cross of Christ.

Thus, the prophets before the cross said that the sabbath would cease, and the apostles after the cross said that it did cease--where, then, is the controversy? The Christian is not obligated to keep the sabbath, and no Christian should judge another if he does not keep it. Therefore, the sabbath is not the day which God specified that Christians should meet together. The Sabbath was for the Jew, and it is not for the Christian. Be with us next week as we continue to discuss this very important question, that is, is there a day upon which Christians are required to meet every week, and if so, what is that day? Since it is not the Sabbath, what is that day?

SABBATH OR THE LORD'S DAY? (II)

Last week we began a discussion of the Sabbath with regards toward answering this question: on what specific day should Christians meet at least once every week? Some argue that that day is the seventh day, the Sabbath. Last week we noted two very important points. (1) The Sabbath was never observed until God brought Israel out of Egyptian bondage and gave it to them as a national sign between himself and the Jews. (2) The prophets Amos and Hosea prophesied that the sabbath day would cease to function as a holy day when Israel came to an end, and we saw that these prophecies were fulfilled in the New Testament.

This morning I want to continue this discussion for a moment and note in particular one extremely important passage: Colossians 2:14-17. There the apostle Paul writes that Christ has "cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and he has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When he had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through him. Therefore, let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink, or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day--things which are a mere shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ." In verse 14, of this passage we just read, Paul's point is to note that the law of Moses with all its decrees and commandments was nailed to the cross of Christ. It has been taken out of the way. That partition, according to Paul, which divided the Jew from the Gentile has been broken down (Ephesians 2:15). The law of Moses has

abolished. As Paul declared in Galatians 3:25, we are no longer under the law, but under Christ. But what does this mean with respect to keeping the holy days of the Old Testament, and in particular with respect to the Sabbath. Paul answers our question in verses 16,17 of Colossians 2. Let us read again what Paul wrote there, he says: "Therefore, let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink, or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day." In other words, no one stands condemned because he does not keep the Sabbath for the Law of Moses, including its Sabbath requirements, has been nailed to the cross. We are no longer under the law, but under grace.

But the Sabbatarians object that Jesus himself kept the Sabbath, and since Jesus is our example, we should also keep the Sabbath. However, it must be remembered that Jesus was born and lived under the law which Paul said we are no longer under (Galatians 4:4). The law was not taken out of the way until Christ died on the cross. It was not until Christ died that his will was put into effect and the law of Moses was nailed to that cross. As Hebrews 9:15-17 teaches, before a testament can be put into effect, there must first be the death of the testator. Therefore, the law of Christ did take the place of the law of Moses until Christ died (Hebrews 8:7). Since Jesus lived under the law of Moses, he was obligated to keep the Sabbath, but we ourselves are no longer under that law.

But, the Sabbatarians say, the command to keep the Sabbath is one of the ten commandments, and these were not taken out of the way by Christ on the cross. The Bible, however, takes a different view of the matter. Turn to Romans 7 and read with

verse 6. There Paul writes: "But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in the boldness of the letter." The apostle clearly affirms that we were released from the law, that is, the law of Moses! We are no longer married to the law, as the imagery of Romans 7:1-4 indicates, but married to Christ. Therefore, we are dead to the law, and alive to Christ. But does that law from which we are released include the ten commandments? Let us read verse 7 of Romans 7, and we will answer our question. Paul continues: "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "You shall not covet." The law, therefore, about which Paul was writing included the commandment: "Thou shalt not covet," and that is the tenth commandment of the decalogue. Therefore, when Paul declared that we had been released from the law, he was including the ten commandments as apart of that law. We then are not obligated to keep the ten commandments as they exist in the Mosaic legislation, and that includes the Sabbath.

The Sabbath, then, was primarily intended to be a national sign between God and Israel to remind Israel of what God had done for them in bring them out of Egypt. However, the prophets foretold that the Sabbath would some day cease, and the apostles of the New Testament affirm that it did cease when Christ died on the cross of Calvary. Christians, therefore, are not obligated by the New Testament to observe the Sabbath, or meet together on the seventh day of the week.

But our question is before us: on what day does God require his saints to meet at least once every week? If it is not the Sabbath, what is it?

Before answering that question, we must note that the first century Christians did meet regularly to worship God together. In fact the Hebrew writer rebukes those Christians who had been forsaking the assembling of the saints together. In Hebrews 10:25, the Holy Spirit says: "Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together, as is the habit of some." Some Christians were habitually neglecting the worship of the saints, and for them to consistently miss such assemblies, there must have been some regular assembling of the saints. Further in I Corinthians 11:18, the apostle Paul mentions that on the occasions when the church comes together in one place, there exists factions in the church. Paul, then, assumes that the church meet together on some regular occasions to worship God, and in I Corinthians 11, to specifically partake of the Lord's supper.

However, these considerations do not tell us when the early Christians did meet, but only that they met with some regularity. When, then, did the Christians meet? Luke answers our question for us in Acts 20:7. Remember in I Corinthians 11, the saints there came together to partake of the Lord's Supper, and Luke supplements our understanding by designating the very day that they came together to celebrate the Lord's death and resurrection. The text of Acts 20:7 reads: "And on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to depart the next day and he prolonged his message until midnight."

According to Luke, the Christians in Troas, came together to break bread on the first day of the week, equivalent to our Sunday. That this was the specific day for partaking of the Lord's Supper is indicated by the fact that the apostle Paul stayed in Troas just long enough to meet with the saints and fellowship with them in breaking bread. Thus, Paul knew that the Christians would meet on the first day of the week for that purpose, and he stayed over to be with them on that occasion. The day on which the Christians came together was not Saturday or the Sabbath, but it was in the words of Luke, the first day of the week.

That this is the day when Christians regularly met is confirmed by I Corinthians 16:1,2. Earlier in the Corinthian letter, Paul assumed that the Corinthians regularly came together to celebrate the Lord's Supper. In chapter 16, he indicates to us when that regular assembly was. In verse 2, Paul writes: "On the first day of every week let each of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come." Thus, Paul assumes that the Corinthians met on the first day of the week, not only that, but that they met every first day of the week. It was not a once a month affair, but something which the Christians in Corinth did every week, and if they did not already do so, Paul surely commands them here to meet every first day of the week.

Thus, the day upon which Christians of the New Testament met to worship God was not the sabbath, but the first day of the week. But why the first day of the week? Because it is the day that Christ rose from the dead. What better day to celebrate the Lord's Supper, than on the day which our Lord rose from the grave.