

LESSON 10 – THE NATURE OF WORSHIP IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

1) INTRODUCTION

- a) In our study about NT church organization, we see God has laid out a pattern for how a local church should be organized
 - i) A church, when scripturally organized, is composed of elders who oversee a local congregation, deacons who serve the congregation under the guidance of the eldership, and saints who work according to the ability God has given them
 - ii) The authority of elders was carefully limited by God in that a plurality of elders in a church prevent one-man rule and that elders were prevented from exercising rule over more than one local congregation

- b) In the next 2 lessons, we will study how God wants worship to be conducted by a local church
 - i) As was the case with local church organization, God has not left us guessing as to what is acceptable worship
 - ii) Those of us who desire to “continue steadfastly in the apostles doctrine” (Acts 2:42) will pay special attention to the commands, approved examples, and necessary implications we find recorded in scripture as it pertains to acceptable worship
 - iii) The reason we stress the phrase “acceptable worship” is to help us to understand that many individuals worshipped God in the bible, but did not do so by His guidelines or His authority – and God rejected their worship

Question 1: Read **Gen 4:3-5** & **Heb 11:4**. Why was Abel’s sacrifice more acceptable than Cain’s?

Question 2: Read **Rom 10:17**. Where does Paul say that faith comes from?

Question 3: Read **Rom 14:23**. What does Paul say about things that are not from faith?

2) UNACCEPTABLE NEW TESTAMENT WORSHIP

- a) As politically incorrect as it may be, the bible is very clear about the fact that not all worship offered to God is accepted by Him
 - i) In fact, in the NT, we read about 4 kinds of worship, 3 of which that are not accepted by God.

Question 4: Read **Matt 15:9**. What is “vain” worship and why is it not acceptable to God? How might we offer vain worship today?

Question 5: Read **Acts 17:22-23**. What is ignorant worship and why is it not acceptable to God? How might we offer ignorant worship today?

Question 6: Read **Col 2:20-23**. What is self-made religion/worship and why is it not acceptable to God? How might we offer self-made worship today?

- ii) What we learn from these passages is that just because we express ourselves to God and offer Him worship does not mean that He will accept our worship
- iii) However, since worship is required by God of His people, we need to seek out His will for worship in the pages of the New Testament
- iv) Fortunately, God tells us what is acceptable worship in His sight

3) *IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH*

- a) In the Old Testament, God had very detailed guidelines for how the Jews were to worship Him appropriately
 - i) In John 4, Jesus is speaking to a Samaritan woman by a well and she brings up the fact that Samaritans and Jews had conflicting views in how and where God ought to be worshiped

Question 7: Read **John 4:20-24**. In verse 24, in what two ways does Jesus say God must be worshipped?

- ii) These two elements form the pattern for how God must be worshipped if our worship is to truly be acceptable. He must be worshipped in spirit and in truth
- iii) To understand what it means to worship God in spirit and in truth, we must consider the context in which it was stated
- b) In this exchange, Jesus contrasts worship in the OT with how it would eventually be in the NT
 - i) He begins by saying that God is Spirit. Therefore worship to Him must be spiritual, that is, in keeping to His nature. This is in contrast to the physical and fleshly worship that defined OT worship
 - ii) **Heb 9:1-10** teaches us that OT worship consisted of fleshly ordinances: a physical tabernacle, special clothing for priests, lampstands, burning of incense, instruments of music, animal sacrifices, etc
 - iii) All of these elements appealed to the physical senses. But NT worship focuses on the spiritual side of man
 - iv) For example, God's temple is now spiritual (**1 Cor 3:26; Eph 2:19-22**); All Christians are priests, who offer up spiritual sacrifices (**1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rom 12:1; Heb 13:15**); our prayers are now the incense that is offered to God (**Rev 5:8**); our melody-making instrument is now our heart (**Eph 5:19**), etc.
 - v) The physical ordinances of the OT were only to exist until a "time of reformation", which can only be when the new covenant was to come

- vi) The conclusion we can derive from this is that NT worship is spiritual worship and not the physical worship found in the OT
 - vii) Spiritual worship focuses on the inner man in which his heart is completely engaged in the outpouring of love and devotion to God
 - viii) This is in contrast to the Pharisees who merely worshipped so that they could appear as pious before their fellow man – **Matt 6:1-18**
- c) When it comes to worshipping God in truth, we must offer Him worship according to His truth – His word and His will
- i) The Samaritan woman was not worshipping according to truth because she worshipped at the temple in Samaria and not the one in Jerusalem – and Jesus calls her on it
 - ii) In other words, there is more to acceptable worship than it being spiritual. There is more to worship than what comes from our heart. There is more to worship than sincerity and good intentions (though we admit these things are necessary)
 - iii) Worship must be according to faith. Faith comes by hearing God’s word. Therefore acceptable worship must be that which God has designated in the New Testament

Question 8: Read **Eph 5:17**. What does God want us to understand in order to be wise?

- iv) That acceptable worship must be according to God’s will can cause emotions to rise on the part of people who are attracted to types of worship not authorized in scripture
- v) And if people perceive we’re being unfair or too critical toward their worship, it’s common for that person to get angry and dismiss our attempts at unity
- vi) But we need to remember that the first murder in the bible came as a result of these types of emotions. Cain murdered Abel because God accepted Abel’s worship and not his – be on guard!
- vii) We must remember that the purpose of discussing this subject is to assure that we’re truly worshipping according to truth and not trying to justify something I happen to enjoy
- viii) What can help us find closure over this subject is to remember that our worship does not supply God’s needs. Worship supplies our needs. In worship, we are the ones with the need to express ourselves so that we can draw closer to God
- ix) And since God created us and knows what we need better than we do, He knows the type of worship we should be offering to help us be the best possible Christians
- x) Therefore, worshipping in truth is not about punching our timecard through the shallow following of commands. It’s a divinely instructed experience to further mold and shape us into the image of His Son.

4) FOR EDIFICATION

- a) Worship, in its most obvious sense, is directed toward God. In fact, it is one of the greatest gifts God has given man: an outlet to praise and honor our Creator and Redeemer
 - i) But one crucial point that many miss about the purpose of worship, a point that scripture stresses over and over again, is that it also edifies and builds one another up

Question 9: Read **1 Cor 14:26**. What must all worship be done for?

- ii) The meaning of edification is “building up.” In the context of worship, it is the building up and encouraging of one another
- iii) This was true in regards to New Testament singing. Singing, although it is done to praise God, is also done by “speaking to one another” and “teaching and admonishing one another” – **Eph 5:19; Col 3:16**
- iv) Note the true source of their encouragement. It was not in the music or melody of the songs themselves, but in the words of the songs spoken by each Christian to one another
- v) Spiritual worship has been designed by God to impact the spiritual side of man, **not the fleshly**
- vi) Therefore, all worship in the church should edify (build up) those engaged in it, not by what may sound good to the ears (instrumental music, eloquence of preacher’s speech, etc) but by the words that impact the heart of man (the spirit)

Question 10: Read **Heb 10:24-25**. What is the reason given for why we must not forsake our assembling together?

5) **PROPERLY & ORDERLY**

- a) At a time when Christians enjoyed the benefits of spiritual gifts, the Corinthian Christians were misusing them (1 Cor 14)
 - i) Paul says that spiritual gifts, such as the gift of tongue speaking (foreign languages) were designed to be a sign to unbelievers – **1 Cor 14:22**
 - ii) Yet the Corinthians were misusing the gift by speaking without interpreters present or by speaking all at once so no one could understand what they were saying – **1 Cor 14:23**

Question 11: Read **1 Cor 14:40**. How does Paul instruct the Corinthians to worship?

- iii) In order to do this, Paul said that when they spoke in tongues, they must do so one at a time and no more than three, and if there wasn’t an interpreter present, they must remain silent – **1 Cor 14:27-28**
- b) So to worship properly is to do so in a seemly matter, fitting for the occasion, and to worship orderly is to do so by a fixed arrangement
 - i) This in turn glorifies God because every participant is benefited from it and not distracted or confused
 - ii) If worship is chaotic or spontaneous and people do not know what is going on, how can they be built up? And if we’re not built up, how can God be glorified since we are not progressing further towards godliness?

Question 12: Read **1 Cor 14:33**. What is God not?
