

WORSHIP

Unauthorized

(Number four in a series of ten)

“Simon says ... jump up and down!” We are all familiar with this little child’s game and understand well the principle of authority which is involved. If you do what “Simon” says (authorizes) you remain in the game — if you do something he does not say (authorize) you lose. We apply this same principle in every area of our lives. When we place an order for a hamburger, we understand that we will not get several things extra. Why? Because we did not authorize such.

God expects us to use the same principle in regard to our actions toward Him. He tells us that “whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Colossians 3:17). This means we must act “in the name of” or by the authority of Christ. If we apply such to our worship, we see that God has authorized a certain type of worship. Jesus said “true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23). God lets us know that authorized worship has two components: spirit and truth. We understand that to worship in “spirit” is to worship from the heart — in sincerity. To worship in “truth” is to worship in the way His Word has revealed. Jesus said “thy word is truth” (John 17:17). What then does His Word authorize as acceptable actions to be offered sincerely unto Him?

- ① Prayer (Acts 2:42)
- ② Singing (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19)

③ The Lord’s Supper on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7)

④ Freewill offering of our means on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:1-2)

⑤ Preaching His Word (Acts 20:7)

Search as one may, these are the only five acts of worship which God has authorized. If we offer these acts to God as He has commanded and from a sincere heart, we are pleasing to God for “the Father seeketh such to worship Him” (John 4:23). Sadly though there are many who fail to act within God’s authority in these matters. Man can offer to God unauthorized worship in basically three ways, and be unacceptable to God.

Spirit Minus Truth

In the very text wherein we find the authorized components of worship, we find Jesus speaking to the Samaritan woman. Of the worship that the Samaritans offered Jesus said, “Ye worship ye know not what” (John 4:22). Paul, in speaking to those of Athens whom he said were very religious, said they “ignorantly worship” (Acts 17:23). In both of these instances, we see individuals worshiping sincerely, yet their worship was unacceptable for it was not “in truth.” There are many in the world today who are sincere in their worship. They may, in fact, be very zealous — but they are wrong. Some of the actions in which we find sincere individuals engaging are:

- Accompanying singing with mechanical instruments.
- Partaking of the Lord’s Supper at times other than the first day of the week or not

partaking of it on the first day of the week.

- Financing the work of the church by means other than the freewill offerings of members on the first day of the week.
- Teaching things other than that which God has spoken in His Word.

Remember again the principle of authority discussed earlier. Where is God’s authority for any of the actions above? Sincere as one may be in these actions, they cannot be done “in truth” and thus are unauthorized. We are told “the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:30).

Truth Minus Spirit

As Isaiah wrote to the children of God he noted that God delighted not in their “burnt offerings,” the blood of the sacrifices, their “new moons and sabbaths” and the like. Of such worship God said He was “weary to bear them” (Isaiah 1:10-15). Note that the *actions* were right, so why did God disdain them? Because they were not in *spirit*. The people were living sinfully and making a mockery of the worship by their insincere approach to God (verses 3-4, 15-16). Many today may indeed worship in accordance with those actions God has authorized, but their worship is still unacceptable because they lack the other component — “in spirit.” Note what James said of this attitude:

“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:4).

We cannot live a life with unrepented sin

and worship acceptably. As some have phrased it: “We cannot sup with the devil and eat at the Lord’s table.” Likewise we find those who approach worship in an insincere way by their lack of reverence and concern. When the worship assembly is being conducted, one cannot be passing notes, visiting with others or constantly daydreaming and suppose that God will regard such worship! Worship in spirit means our heart must be in the worship offered to God — not with the one next to us, our job or some activity we have planned later in the day.

No Truth - No Spirit

Paul, in writing to the church in Colossae condemned the idea of “will worship” (Colossians 2:23). Will worship is simply self devised worship as I “will” it to be without regard to what God has authorized. Jereboam was guilty of such when he changed the place, people and time of worship in order to serve his own purposes of having the people follow him (1 Kings 12:25-33). Jesus condemned the Jews for this attitude as they were more concerned about the “traditions of the elders” than the “commandment of God” (Matthew 15:1-3). As a result He said their worship was “in vain” for it was after the “commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9). Today this lack of spirit and truth is shown when we do such things as:

- Attend the services of our Lord only when convenient for us.
- Participate only in the actions of worship which we desire. (For example I may decide I don’t like to sing, or don’t want

to give of my means, or simply decide to “tune out” the teaching.)

- Seek worship or a church to worship with which “I like” instead of seeking worship which is according to “truth.”
- Worship in a certain way because “my family has always been a member of this church” or “worshipped this way” rather than determining to put God and His will above any and all.

Sadly many still worship in “vain . . . teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9).

In spite of how plain and simple God’s Word is concerning authorized worship it is amazing how many worship in vain — offering that which is unauthorized. But the Scriptures still proclaim “true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him” (John 4:23). *Has He found such in you?*

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