

## Acceptable Worship

What the world understands as Christianity is fractured and divided. Estimates of the numbers of “Christian” denominations vary greatly. Some researchers estimate that there are 43,000 denominations throughout the world. While others claim that this number is greatly exaggerated by calling different organizations of the same group separate denominations. In fact some researchers claim that there are actually only about 40 denominations and some say that there only six real Christian denominations. They claim that these are Catholic, Protestants, Independents, Marginals, Orthodox, and Anglicans.

These denominations are identified by their differences in beliefs which are often a reflection of how they understand the Bible. And therefore, how they worship God. Some think that the Bible must be interpreted as “permissive” meaning that whatever is not expressly forbidden in the Bible is allowed, while others take a “prohibited” view meaning that whatever is not specifically allowed in the Bible is prohibited. This is really important in dealing with the “silence” of the Bible. It is a question we have to answer when we are studying what is acceptable worship.

When Jesus was talking with the Samaritan woman, He made the following statement concerning how we are to worship God. **John 4:23-24 (KJV)** *“But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”* So our worship today must be in spirit and truth. But what does this mean exactly? In an article on the Christian Courier website, Wayne Jackson states that the idea of worshiping in spirit seems to mean that “the entire heart enters into the act. It is the attitude that we use to worship which is just as important as what we are doing with our body. Just attending worship activities while thinking about the fishing trip you plan for that afternoon is not acceptable worship. It is the sincerity of the worship that is important. In fact, Joshua made what seems to be a similar statement. **Joshua 24:14 (KJV)** *“Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD.”* Compare what Joshua says with what John writes:

1. Joshua: “serve him in sincerity and in truth”
2. John quoting Jesus: “worship him in spirit and truth”

So it seems clear that what is being taught is that we have to worship sincerely and with our minds focused on what we are doing and not wondering around thinking about what we will do later or the next day or week.

The Bible provides quite a bit of guidance on worshiping in truth. First the only being that we can worship is deity. Only God deserves our worship (Matthew 4:10). But worshiping God includes all three beings in the godhead. We know that we are to worship the Father. But Jesus and the Holy Spirit are equally God and they equally deserve our worship. Jesus accepted worship while on earth. **Matthew 8:1-3 (KJV)** *“When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.”*

Worshiping in truth means that we worship God in the manner in which He has prescribed. Because of the “permissive” interpretation of the Bible that some have, they have included worship activities that were never meant to be used. Jesus deals with this in **Matthew 15:8-9 (KJV)** where he says; *“This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”* In this statement Jesus deals with both worshiping with a wrong spirit and untruthfully. But it is the truthfulness of the worship that I want us to look at now. Jesus says that these worship in vain because they are teaching their own commandments as doctrine.

When we begin to teach our own ideas for worship as the commandments of God, then we begin to worship in

vain. The Old Law and its associated writings were abolished when Jesus died on the cross. They served a purpose as a "schoolmaster" to bring us to Jesus but we are no longer under this schoolmaster (Galatians 3:24-25). So when we go back to the Old Testament to justify our worship practices we are, in essence teaching as doctrine the commandments of men and worshiping in vain. We do not offer sacrifices now, Jesus did that once and for all (Hebrews 9:28) and neither do we praise God the same way that David did.

Our worship today is composed of five parts. These are <sup>1)</sup> The Lord's Supper, <sup>2)</sup> Prayer, <sup>3)</sup> Singing, <sup>4)</sup> Offering, and <sup>5)</sup> Teaching the Word. To be acceptable worship, these have to be conducted the way and in the manner that is prescribed in the New Testament. The Lord's Supper must contain ONLY unleavened bread and fruit of the vine (1 Corinthians 11:23-29) and it must be observed when we meet together on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). Prayer must be made to God in the name of Jesus (John 16:23). Singing must be singing and not playing an instrument (Ephesians 5:19). The offering must be freely given on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:2). And finally the teaching must be clearly from the word of God by men only (1 Corinthians 14:34) . These are the only acceptable forms of worship today.