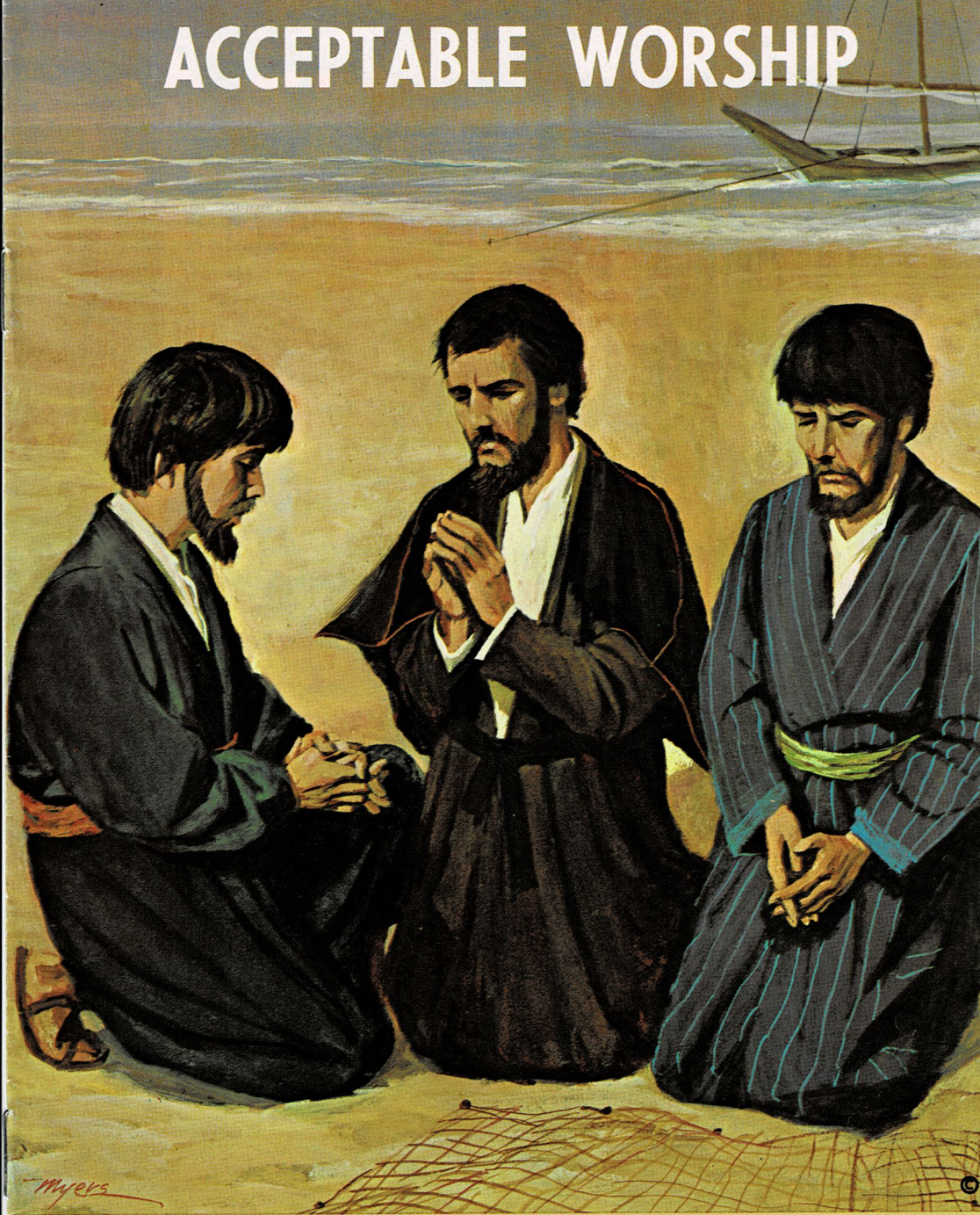


# ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP



## LESSON SIX

# BIBLE CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

BY JOHN M. HURT





# THE FOOL'S PRAYER

The royal feast was done; the king  
Sought some new sport to banish care,  
And to his jester cried: "Sir Fool,  
Kneel down and make for us a prayer!"

The jester doffed his cap and bells,  
And stood the mocking court before;  
They could not see the bitter smile  
Behind the painted grin he wore.

He bowed his head, and bent his knee  
Upon the monarch's silken stool;  
His pleading voice arose: "O Lord,  
Be merciful to me, a fool!"

These clumsy feet, still in the mire,  
Go crushing blossoms without end;  
These hard, well meaning hands I thrust  
Among the heart-strings of a friend.

Earth bears no balsam for mistakes;  
Men crown the knave, and scourge the tool  
That did his will; but Thou, O Lord,  
Be merciful to me, a fool!"

The room was hushed; in silence rose  
The King, and sought his gardens cool,  
And walked apart, and murmured low,  
"Be merciful to me, a fool!"

*By Edward Rowland Sill*

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# Acceptable Worship

Down through the ages man has constantly sensed the existence of a supreme intelligence in the universe. This realization has come, not only from the Bible, but from our physical surroundings as well. In the long ago David said, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork" (Psalms 19:1). In view of all the great enthusiasm that has been expended in worship to deity throughout the ages, it is regrettable that the great mass of such worship has been so conducted and directed as to be unacceptable in the eyes of God. When the children of Israel worshipped the golden calf, they said that they were worshipping "God" who brought them up out of the land of Egypt (Nehemiah 9:18). The Bible teaches that though this worship was characterized by enthusiasm, it was an abomination in the eyes of the Lord (Exodus 32:8-10).

As we read of the false worship for Baal, Dagon, Ashtoreth and Molech, we are made to realize that in order for worship to be acceptable it must not only be directed to the one true God, but that it must also be according to God's divine directions. These idol worshippers might have claimed that they were worshipping the supreme creator of the universe, just as were the Israelites, even though they called him by other names. It is evident that many such people did not consider their stone idols to actually be their "god," but only representative of the deity which they served (See Exodus 32:4-6). Worship, however, no matter how sincerely performed, is not acceptable to God unless it is done according to His divine instructions.



## *In Spirit and in Truth*

Jesus said that true worshippers would "worship the Father in spirit AND IN TRUTH . . ." (John 4:23). Not only must worship be sincerely done, but it must also be carried out in the exact manner laid down by Christ and his inspired apostles. In order to worship "in truth" we must worship according to the directions given in God's Word. Jesus clarified his statement that we must worship "in truth" when He prayed to the Father, "Sanctify them through thy truth: THY WORD IS TRUTH" (John 17:17). To worship "in truth" then is to worship according to the exact directions of the New Testament.

Through the ages there have been those who have considered themselves Christians who have attempted to worship God in ways which differ from those practiced and taught in New Testament times. It has been reasoned that they are still worshipping sincerely and that the actual form of worship is unimportant. This same line of reasoning, however, could be used with equal justification to support the worship of Baal, Molech and the golden calf, not to speak of such modern false religions as Mohammedanism, Buddhism and Hinduism which deny Christ and all for which He stands.



## ***More Than SINCERITY Alone***

Although sincerity has always been vital to acceptable worship, sincerity alone is not enough. Few would doubt that there have been many sincere worshippers in each of the groups just mentioned, yet this of itself does not justify their rebellion against God's law. Paul was sincere when he persecuted Christians, thinking that he was carrying out the will of God, yet later realized that he had grievously sinned in so doing (Acts 22:3-8; 23:1). Acceptable worship then, must not be according to what we "think" would be pleasing to God, but according to what the Bible actually says that God wants.

Someone might reason, for example, that cake and soft drink should be added to the unleavened bread and cup of the Lord's Supper, since this might be more appealing to the young people. Though it might be claimed that such action could be sincerely carried out, and that "the Bible doesn't say not to do so," few would be so worldly minded as to uphold such a flagrant violation of Christ's teachings. The important point here is that in order to worship God acceptably we must worship according to the New Testament pattern and not according to what we "think" would be appropriate. We remember again the words of God, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" . . . (Isaiah 55:8). We might think an act of worship wonderful and beautiful which would actually be coarse and disgusting in the eyes of the Lord. The real test for whether or not a practice constitutes acceptable worship then is "can authority for it be found in the New Testament?"

As we shall see later, some commonly accepted modern practices were never allowed in the New Testament church as long as the apostles lived and were only brought in by human reason and against much opposition after they died. Jesus taught that to change God's plan in any way makes the entire worship vain and useless. These are his very words concerning those who would do so. "But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:9, see also Revelations 22:18-19, Galatians 1:8-9).

The tendency to "improve upon" God's plan is not new. It has been practiced and condemned throughout the ages. The Bible describes, for example, how King Saul attempted to "improve" upon God's command concerning the destruction of the Amelikites. He reasoned that it would be wonderful "aid" to the worship of God if they brought back the best of the flocks to use for sacrifices. We remember that God had not given Saul authority to do so however, and therefore cast him out from being king because of his presumptuous sin (I Samuel 15:26, Psalms 19:13).

A similar case is that of two Old Testament priests, Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1-2). The Bible describes

## **CHANGES IN WORSHIP**





how they attempted to "improve" upon God's plan by bringing into the worship "... strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not." (or "which he had not commanded them," . . . Goodspeed Translation.) For this act of disobedience . . . "there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them and they died before the Lord." (Verse 2) Had they been given time they might have defended their action by saying that "God had not commanded it but He didn't say we couldn't worship in this way, therefore it is alright to do so." The point here again, however, is that God does not tell us all the things we cannot do as acts of worship and obedience for this would fill a book many miles thick. When he tells us what we must do, he automatically excludes everything else. Thus, when we are taught to use unleavened bread in the Lord's Supper this automatically excludes cake, candy, corn bread, and all other things which human reason might invent. This same principle holds true of all other acts of worship and obedience.

## **RETURNING TO THE NEW TESTAMENT PATTERN**

In vivid contrast to the pomp, ceremony and ritual of humanly devised religion stands the simple, yet beautiful worship of the New Testament church. This worship, inspired by God and taught by the apostles, provides the only real pattern by which acceptable worship can be carried out today. One danger in falling away from this pattern lies in the fact that some unscriptural human practices have been carried on so long that they are often accepted without the slightest hesitation even though authority for their use cannot be found in a single verse of the New Testament. Since they cannot be found in God's Word they must of necessity be "the commandments of men" of which Jesus spoke and therefore constitute vain worship (Matthew 15:9).

The Bible teaches that the plan of worship laid down by Christ and the apostles was simple and easily understood. It consisted of five items—1. prayer, 2. preaching, 3. giving, 4. the Lord's Supper, and 5. singing. A brief study of each of these follows:

### **PRAYER**

The importance of prayer is so generally accepted as to require little com-

ment. A few of the many scriptures that might be cited are: Acts 2:42; 12:5 and 12; 16:25; 20:36; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; 1 Timothy 2:1,, 2,3; Romans 8:26. Even on this subject, however, human changes have sometimes been made. The practice of praying to Mary or to certain "saints" or of praying through them to God falls into this category. The Bible says that there is only "... one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). Mary is nowhere in the Bible exalted to such a position, nor is it even hinted that she has any kind of special authority or position above any other faithful disciples. (See Matthew 12:46-50). The practice of praying to "saints" is likewise the product of pure human imagination and has absolutely no basis in the scriptures. Even an angel of God would not allow such homage (Revelation 19:10, see also Acts 10:25-26). All such acts are therefore the "commandments of men" and are vain worship (Matthew 15:9).

### **PREACHING**

Like prayer, the importance of preaching the gospel is so widely accepted as to need little comment.



Some prominent scriptures are: Acts 20:7; Galatians 1:8-9; I Corinthians 1:21 and Acts 2:42. Even in this act however, men have sometimes departed from God's way. The practice of having women preachers publicly taking authority over men in the church has always been condemned in the New Testament in terms that cannot be misunderstood. The apostle Paul said, "Let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law" (I Corinthians 14:34). Again we read, "But I suffer not a woman to teach nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (I Timothy 2:12). This does not keep a woman from teaching other women or children (Titus 2:3-4).

## GIVING

In I Corinthians 16:1-2 the Bible states that the contribution was taken "upon the first day of the week." Although supporting the preaching of the gospel is a responsibility and privilege of every Christian it is always described in the New Testament as being



done on a free will basis. High pressure methods, assessments etc. were therefore never used. The Bible teaches that if contributions have to be secured by such methods they are not acceptable, regardless of the amount (II Corinthians 9:7). For this reason collections were not taken at every service and other methods of raising money for the work of the church are unknown to the New Testament. Other related scriptures are II

Corinthians 8:1-8, Matthew 19:29, Luke 21:1-4.

## THE LORD'S SUPPER

The partaking of the Lord's Supper should be, to every Christian, one of the most wonderful experiences possible. Jesus said of the bread, "... this do in remembrance of me ..." and again of the cup, "... this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me" (I Corinthians 11:24-25, Luke 22:19-20). Communion then, should never be a mere duty, but a marvelous privilege. Paul said, "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come."

In the New Testament church the



Lord's Supper was taken every Sunday. Both secular and Biblical history show that as long as the apostles lived and for many years thereafter, it was never demoted to an inferior monthly or quarterly position. In Acts we read of the practice of the New Testament church in these words: "And upon THE first day of the week, WHEN THE DISCIPLES CAME TOGETHER TO BREAK BREAD, Paul preached unto them ..." (Acts 20:7). We learn from this scripture and I Corinthians 16:1-2 that the first day of the week was the day of regular assembling and that one of the key reasons for these gatherings was to "break bread" or partake of the Lord's Supper. Secular history also points out that it was the practice of the early church to partake of the Lord's Supper every Sunday.<sup>1</sup> Lest it should be said that Acts 20:7 does not say every week let us note two similar scriptures. In the Old Testament God com-

1. See Augustus Neander, *History of the Christian Religion and Church*, Vol. 1, p. 332



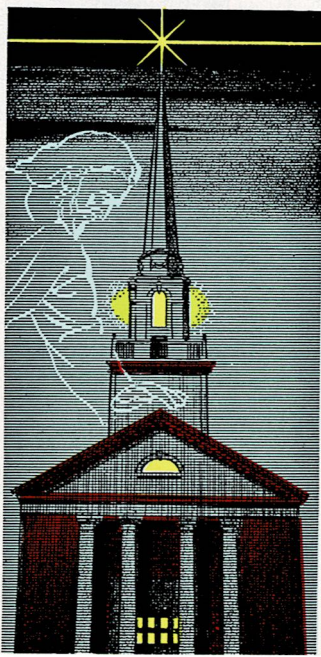
manded, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8). Though the Jews might have rejected the obvious meaning of this statement by arguing that it "didn't say every sabbath day," these who did not remember every single one were condemned for their folly (See Numbers 15:32-36). Again in I Corinthians 16: 1-2 the Bible tells us that the contribution was taken "upon THE first day of the week." (Verse 2). If taking the Lord's Supper less often than the apostles did is right and will make it more appreciated, as some assert, why isn't the same reasoning used regarding singing, praying or taking the collection?

### SINGING

One other characteristic of New Testament worship which may seem very strange is that their music was always exclusively vocal.<sup>2</sup> There is not one single case in the New Testament of a mechanical instrument of music ever being used in the church by either the apostles or any faithful disciple, though such instruments were in common use among almost every other group of that age. Secular history shows that instrumental music was purely a "commandment of men" first appearing in about 666 A.D., several hundred years after the apostles died, and without any authority whatsoever from the New Testament. The New Testament clearly commands Christians to sing (vocal music) just as Noah was commanded to build an ark of gopher wood (Genesis 6:14; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). To add pianos, organs, guitars, etc. to the worship without divine authority violates the same principle that Noah would have violated had he mixed pine with the gopher wood which God commanded to be used in the ark. Had Noah done

such a thing he could have reasoned in the same manner as the person who would add cake and soft drink to the Lord's Supper or instrumental music to the worship, that "God does not say he couldn't do so." As we learned earlier from Nadab and Abihu, however, God does not tell us all the things we cannot do as acts of worship, but gives us authority to do only what He has specifically commanded (Leviticus 10:1-2).

Many things which may seem wonderful to us may actually be disgusting in the eyes of God (Isaiah 55:8). Had instrumental music really been only an "aid" as is sometimes claimed, surely the apostles, who were inspired and loved the church more than life itself, would have seen fit to use it. Though in the Old Testament David used instrumental music in worship along with animal sacrifices and the burning of incense, it was always conspicuously absent from the worship of the New Testament church. (See Lesson III, page 7). Multiplied thousands throughout the world still worship according to this simple, yet beautiful New Testament pattern. This fact will be discussed more thoroughly in Lesson VIII.



2. See Hugo Leichtentritt, *Music, History and Ideas*, p. 34



# Questions

Please answer the following questions  
and return this last page to be graded.

## LESSON VI

### I. LOCATE THE SCRIPTURE: Circle the scripture which states:

1. The disciples came together upon the first day of the week to break bread.  
A. Revelation 22:18 B. Acts 20:7 C. Matthew 7:22
2. We are to "sing" and make "melody" in our hearts unto the Lord.  
A. Ephesians 5:19 B. Colossians 3:16 C. Matthew 26:30
3. "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store,  
as God has prospered him . . ."  
A. 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 B. 2 Corinthians 9:7 C. Matthew 19:29
4. "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man . . ."  
A. 1 Corinthians 14:34 B. Titus 2:3-4 C. 1 Timothy 2:12
5. "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men . . ."  
A. Matthew 12:46-50 B. Ephesians 1:1 C. 1 Timothy 2:5

### II. TRUE-FALSE: If the statement is true, circle "T," if it is false circle "F".

- T F 1. Acceptable worship must be both in spirit and in truth.  
T F 2. God's Word is truth.  
T F 3. It would be just as well to add cake and soft drink to the Lord's  
Supper, since the Bible does not specifically say we cannot do so.  
T F 4. God always feels about things just as man does.  
T F 5. To teach for doctrines the commandments of men makes worship vain.  
T F 6. The Bible describes five items of New Testament worship.  
T F 7. The Scriptures say we should pray to Mary and to "Saints."  
T F 8. As often as we take the Lord's Supper we show forth Christ's death.  
T F 9. The statement "Remember the sabbath day . . ." meant only once  
a month or once every three months.  
T F 10. The Bible says that the early church used instrumental music.

### III. NAME THE MAN:

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. He sinned by bringing back sacrifices from the Amalekites  
to offer to the Lord without God's authority.  
\_\_\_\_\_ 2. The apostle who said, "Let your women keep silence in  
the churches . . ."  
\_\_\_\_\_ 3. The man who fell at Peter's feet to worship, but was in-  
structed not to do so.  
\_\_\_\_\_ 4. He and his brother Abihu were condemned for bringing  
something into the worship which God had not commanded.  
\_\_\_\_\_ 5. Who said, "In vain do they worship me, teaching for  
doctrines the commandments of men."

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