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“. . . Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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## THE NATURE OF TRUTH

Part Four  
By Ted J. Clarke

### REVIEW

The three previous lessons in this series discussed: (1) the superiority of Christ's New Testament over the Old Testament Law of Moses; (2) the abolition of the OT law, including the passing away of the sabbath as a day of worship; and (3) the establishment of the first day of the week (Sunday) as the day for regular Christian worship. These previous lessons are available if you request them and send us a self-addressed stamped envelope (60 cents postage).

Although we mentioned briefly in the first lesson the matter of **unauthorized worship**, we decided to devote an entire article to the subject. It is not uncommon to see advertisements from denominational churches (and doubly sad, from some churches of Christ who have drifted from the truth) promoting dramas and play acting in place of preaching the word of God; special singing groups and praise teams in place of congregational singing; the Lord's Supper on some other day than the first day of the week, and many other such unauthorized activities in place of Scriptural worship. The object of such actions seems to be entertainment in place of reverent worship and praise.

### WORSHIP IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH

*“Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers 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 must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:22-24).* Jesus told the Samaritan woman, who thought she was worshiping acceptably in the mountain of Samaria, that she really did not know what she was doing. Why could he say such a thing? Because the OT was explicit in its teaching that worship to God was to be centered in Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 12:11; 1 Kings 11:36). The Samaritan Jews had not listened to God's word, therefore they did not know what they were doing when it came to worshiping God acceptably.

It is great to know that God **seeks** our worship, but there is only one type of worship He accepts - **worship in spirit and in truth!** Worshiping in “spirit” has to do with attitude and motivation from the heart, the inner being of man. It is sincerity of purpose, but that alone is not sufficient. I do not doubt that many who worship God in unauthorized ways are sincere and offering heartfelt adoration, but that is not enough. One **“must”** worship in spirit **and in truth.** Truth comes from knowing God's word about worship. Jesus prayed to God for His disciples saying, *“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17).* **Therefore, acceptable worship is that which is sincerely directed toward God according to the truth of His word.** Any other type of worship is unacceptable and unauthorized.

The Jews had set forth their traditions (what they liked) above God's commandments. Jesus scolded and corrected them, quoting a passage from the prophet Isaiah: *“Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, 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” (Matthew 15:7-9; cf. Isaiah 29:13).* Thus, the Lord showed that doing what men say is all right, in place of what God has said, does not truly honor God. Furthermore, one's heart cannot be right before God when one does not do what God has said. **No matter how sincerely one claims to worship God, if that worship is not according to God's word it is vain worship.**

### EXAMPLES OF UNAUTHORIZED WORSHIP

Early in God's revelation to mankind, immediately after the record of the Fall of man into sin and the penalties for sin were assessed (Genesis 3:1-24), God gave us an explicit example of true worship versus unauthorized worship. Cain and Abel, now grown sons of Adam and Eve, brought forth their sacrifices for worship unto God. Abel brought forth an animal sacrifice and Cain an offering of the fruit of the ground (Genesis 4:1-4). God was pleased with Abel's worship, but not with Cain's (verses 4-5). Cain was angry and the Lord said, “If you do right you'll be accepted, but if you do not do right you will have sinned and you'll be rejected. You had better not let sin rule your life” (paraphrase of Genesis 4:7). We know that Abel offered his

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sacrifices by faith, while Cain did not. ***“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh”*** (Hebrews 11:4). Offering “by faith” means that Abel offered what God said like God said to do it. How do we know this? ***“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”*** (Romans 10:17). God told both men how to worship, but only Abel listened to God and did what He said to do. This ought to be a very sobering example to all who ignore God's word and add to it or take away from it in this matter of worship. You cannot offer to God as worship that which is not authorized by His word. For us in this NT system of worship under Christ that means worshiping God according to what Christ has authorized in His New Covenant (Colossians 3:17).

Another meaningful example of how people fall into unauthorized worship is seen in Leviticus 10:1-3: ***“And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. And there***

***went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD, then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the LORD spake, saying I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace.”*** These men were priests under the Law of Moses and sons of the high priest Aaron, yet they were not authorized to substitute for what God had said to do. God had stipulated that the fire for the burning of incense was to come from the coals of the altar of sacrifice in front of the tabernacle (Leviticus 16:12-13). We may think, “Fire is fire, what difference should it make to God where they got the fire to light the incense.” But it did and does make a difference. Who are we to question God or change His commands? Nadab and Abihu, no matter how sincere they might have been, did not sanctify or glorify God by substituting other things for what He had commanded (10:3). They did not worship in truth, so no matter how heartfelt their devotion, it was vain worship. They burned incense, which God had commanded, but they used fire which “he [God] commanded them not” (10:2). The New King James Version perhaps reads more clearly, saying they ***“offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them.”*** Profane fire is unholy fire; unholy because it is not what God commanded. When we try to worship God in ways He has not commanded we are guilty of the same type of worship sin as Nadab and Abihu.

King Saul provides us with more warnings regarding worship violations that strongly displease our Holy God. Saul had been told by Samuel, the last of the Judges to rule in Israel, to ***“go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey”*** (1 Samuel 15:3, NKJV). ***“But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every***

***thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly”*** (verse 9, KJV). When Saul was asked by Samuel why he did not follow the commandment of the Lord, Saul replied, ***“the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice to the Lord thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed”*** (verse 15). After Samuel protested and said again that Saul did not do God's will, Saul repeated his insistence that he had obeyed God and that the people saved the best to sacrifice in worship to God (verses 20-21). Were the motives of Saul and the people good, to sacrifice the best unto God? They would have been good if God had authorized such, but He demanded the opposite of what they did and no amount of reasoning could justify what Saul, as the leader of his people, had allowed to happen. Even a majority of **people** do not have the authority to add to or take from what God has said. Instead of ***“fear[ing] the people and obey[ing] their voice”*** (verse 24), Saul should have feared God and obeyed His voice! Leaders in the Lord's church must take a strong stand against factions or even majorities that want to change God's authorized NT worship. God did not accept unauthorized worship from Saul and the people and He will not accept it from those today that try the same type of practice. ***“And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou has rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king”*** (verses 22-23). **Simply obeying what God has said constitutes acceptable worship to Him is far better than trying to think up ways to worship Him that He has not authorized.** To do otherwise is sin and iniquity in rejecting God's word. The Lord knows what He wants and has revealed to us what He will accept as worship. We cannot come up with anything better than what He has revealed, no matter how hard we try to do so.

*"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9).*

### AUTHORIZED WORSHIP

As mentioned in last month's article, assembled worship to God in this Christian age consists of coming together on the first day of the week for preaching/teaching God's word; prayer; singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (mechanical instruments of music are not authorized for NT worship); observing the Lord's Supper; and contributing financial support as God has prospered us for the work of the church (Hebrews 10:25; Revelation 1:10; Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). Other passages might be offered that relate to these same items of worship, but none authorize additional avenues of assembled worship. If additions, subtractions or modifications are made they are simply the commandments of men and constitute vain worship (Matthew 15:9).

### CONCLUSION

If we can know what is acceptable worship, authorized by God (and we can), then we can also know what constitutes unauthorized worship that God will reject. The OT examples that we highlighted above reflect eternal principles that are valid in any age of God's dealing with men. We do not worship with offerings of animals or fruit of the ground, nor do we burn incense or light lamps as part of our NT worship, for these and such like are not part of the authorized worship revealed to the NT church. However, we are still to offer our worship by faith as Abel did, and we are to do what God said as God said to do it, as Nadab and Abihu should have done. We must also realize that we cannot think up better ways to honor God in worship like Saul and the Israelites tried to do instead of simply obeying what God had said to do in worship to Him.

The Nature of Truth in God's word is such that we can know

what is authorized in worship and what is not; that we can know what and how God wants us to worship and what He will reject. We must worship God in spirit and in truth, the way He wants to be worshiped, not the ways that we think are good or better than His ways. What we do in worship must have the authority of Christ (John 4:24; Colossians 3:17).



### IS HE FAITHFUL?

By Mike Pace  
(Co-editor 1981-1985)

Occasionally within the church, a member will inquire about the spiritual welfare of a brother or sister in Christ by asking a question such as, "Well, is he/she faithful?" And it's not too uncommon to receive an answer similar to, "Oh yes, they're quite faithful, every time the doors are open, you can count on them to be at the services of the church." The implication is that you can determine a Christian's faithfulness by their frequency at the worship services of the church.

Each child of God should be concerned about his/her "faithfulness" to God. Our reward of an eternity in heaven with God Almighty is contingent upon our being "faithful" in His estimation. This is precisely why Jesus exhorted us to "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

We are doing ourselves and others a grave injustice when we measure one's faithfulness solely on attendance to worship services. God most assuredly demands our presence and participation at the worship services of the church as Hebrews 10:25 says, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together . . ." But nowhere within the boundaries of God's Word can we find justification to determine one's faithfulness solely upon regularity at worship services. If that be true, then the question arises, "Faithful in what?"

### BE FAITHFUL IN STUDY

Peter tells us in 2 Peter 1:5, "And besides all this, giving all diligence, add to your faith . . . knowledge".

Food is necessary for growth, and the Word of God is **food** for our spiritual body - the soul. Jesus said, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6). The Apostle Paul in writing to Timothy encouraged us to, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). So the kind of study that meets God's approval is **daily**. Our physical bodies cannot live on one or two meals a week and neither can our souls live on only a couple of study periods a week.

### BE FAITHFUL IN PRAYER

Prayer is one of the most blessed privileges we have as a Christian. One who is not a Christian cannot expect to have his prayers answered. For 1 Peter 3:12 tells us, "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers, but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil." We should realize that there is great power in prayer, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). We should "pray without ceasing" (2 Thessalonians 5:17). Paul is saying, "Be always in an attitude of prayer." The idea is that we are to include God in our every decision, thank God for every blessing, and beseech God for every wrong we do.

### BE FAITH IN ATTENDANCE

We've already mentioned Hebrews 10:25, which emphasizes our participation in the worship services of the church. And to impress upon our minds the seriousness of this matter, the writer went on to say in verse 26 of the same chapter, "For if we sin **willfully** after that we have received a knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for our sins." He was not talking about serious illness or providential hindrance, but **willfully** forsaking the assembly. There are blessings that come through faithful attendance of every service that can come no other way. By singing, giving, studying, fellowship, praying, and partaking of the Lord's Supper - we are strengthened and built up.

**BE FAITHFUL IN WORK**

While faithful attendance is important, we need to realize that going to services of the church will not make one a Christian any more than going to the henhouse will make one a chicken. To be a "faithful" child of God, we must **work** for Him. Our Lord provided the example for us when he said, "I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work" (John 9:4). Paul told us to "Be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord . . ." (1 Corinthians 15:58). It sometimes appears that some Christians are too familiar with the first part of that verse, "Be ye steadfast and unmovable." They can't be motivated to do anything for the Lord; they're truly steadfast and unmovable!! But the latter part of that same verse says, "Always abounding in the work of the Lord." To be faithful then, includes working in His service.

**BE FAITHFUL IN GROWTH**

It is unnatural when a baby fails to grow physically, and similarly it is unnatural when we as Christians do not grow spiritually. Peter said, "But **grow** in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). It seems as if Peter is not only telling us to **grow**, but that he is attempting to instill in us the desire to do so. My son just recently turned 13 years old. He is at the age now that he is desiring to grow physically as quickly as he can. He measures himself often, he exercises regularly, and he's eating all the right things to help him grow big and strong. He has the **desire**. And for us to grow "big and strong" spiritually, we've got to have the **desire** so strongly that we'll measure ourselves often. "Examine yourselves" (2 Corinthians 13:5). We'll exercise our souls by daily study of God's Word and working in the kingdom. And we'll "eat" all the right things that will cause us to grow spiritually. Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God" (Luke 4:4).

**"AM I FAITHFUL?"**

From time to time we need to ask ourselves, Am I faithful in the study of God's Word; in my prayer life; in my attendance to worship services? Am I a faithful worker for the Lord? Am I faithful in my growth? Can I realize and see my spiritual growth? Can God see that I'm growing spiritually? We need to be faithful to God in **all** things; we **must** be faithful for Jesus said, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

Paul's prayer for the Christians at Thessalonica was this, "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly: and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:23). May we all be faithful in **all** things until Jesus comes back for us.

**(FCGN March, 1982)**



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**GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION**

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (1 Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

**THE CHURCH OF CHRIST**

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; 1 Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; 1 Corinthians 12:13).

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