

Acceptable Worship

"They that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in Truth. God seeketh such to worship Him."

The sole purpose of man upon the earth is to please and glorify God. We especially are related to, and dedicated to, these two duties. It is not only our duty, it must be our heartfelt *desire* to please Him, and our burning passion to glorify His Name on the earth as it is now glorified in heaven. That we may each do these things to the very best of our limited ability, is the purpose of our thoughts this morning.

We have come to this hall this morning to worship God, and to refresh our minds in the things that we hold most dear. We have come to this building to worship together. We have gathered here because the Lord said: "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together," and because Jesus said, speaking of the Memorial Supper, "Do this as oft as ye meet in memory of me," and because the apostles commanded that we do these things.

We meet here in this hall every Sunday morning, and Sunday evening, and Thursday evening, and yet we have no special reverence for this hall. It's just a convenient building to serve our needs, any other building would do just as well. We have no reverence for this building or any other on the earth today.

Brethren and sisters, therein lies a danger. We have so little regard for the building, going all out to be opposite in every detail to the apostasy of the world, who reverence their building, that we may not be pleasing in the sight of God.

For we have gathered here to meet God in Spirit and in Truth. We should be *always* meeting God. If we could be conscious of the fact that we are always in the presence of God, what a sobering influence it would be on our lives! And we *are* always in the presence of God.

And think about this, we are always meeting God *in His Holy Temple*. We, my brethren and sisters, ARE the Temple of God. The apostle Paul puts it very strongly to the Corinthian brethren.

"Know ye not that ye are the Temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the Temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the Temple of God is holy, which Temple ye are" (I Cor. 3:16).

This building we meet in is not hallowed; this building is not sacred, or holy. But our meeting together here *is* sacred and hallowed, for we are here to worship God, to call upon His name in prayer, and to remember His Son, who was dead and is alive. We are here to worship God in His Holy Temple; each one of us in God's Holy Temple. "Whose Temple are ye . . ."—each one of us worshiping in his own temple.

Can we grasp the seriousness of the business we are here to do? Jesus said "I must be about my Father's business." We too must be about our Father's business. It's the Father's business when we praise Him in song and in prayer. It's the Father's business when we read His Holy Word. It's the Father's business when we speak, and when we *hear*, the word of exhortation. It's the Father's business when we remember His Son in the memorial service.

It's the Father's business on Sunday night, and on Thursday night. We come here to be about our Father's business; and a more serious and important pursuit we will never encounter in all our days. For we have come to contact and commune with God through His Son.

Can we do this acceptably, without preparation? Can we do it acceptably in a jocular attitude? How could we approach God with indifference? How could we approach Him acceptably without

reverence—with our minds filled with other thoughts, or cares, or plans? Can we do it acceptably, my brethren and sisters, with *one thought* not in harmony with God's purpose?

Let's think about that. How many distractions must be guarded against! How many irritations we must overcome! How many carnal (not wicked, just *fleshly*) concerns flash through our minds, when we should be concentrating on what we are doing? Can we do our Father's business acceptably?

A little *preparation*, before we ever lift our voices in praise, might make our offering more acceptable. And what better way, than to sit quietly in our seats, and read to few verses of His Word?—preparing our minds for those important things that we are about to do.

It's the *mind* that is going to contact God. It is the state of our minds that will make our acts acceptable or not. We begin with a hymn—usually of praise; His Temples raise their voices in praise.

What are the things that will make a hymn acceptable worship? The instruction is: "He must be worshiped in spirit and in truth." Now how do we do that? It is a question of mind and thought. Are we singing *notes and tones*? Are we singing *words*? Or are we singing THOUGHTS?

The quality of the tone is not glorifying to God . . . it may be to man. The recitation of words will never glorify and please Him, that is what we came out of. But a *thought*, a loving, praising, glorifying thought, *is* worshiping Him in spirit and in truth.

Word service without the thought behind it is not even pleasing to man. How much more displeasing to God Who knows the thoughts and the intents of our hearts!—every thought, every moment! Perhaps a line read in deep contemplation, could be more acceptable than a hymn sung in perfect tune

It is not our purpose to minimize the importance of a hymn. It is recorded that at the last supper, after the breaking of bread, Jesus and his disciples sang a hymn.

Neither is it our purpose to belittle the singing class, and its importance. It behoves us to do everything before the Lord to the very best of our ability.

But the point that we do wish to stress is this: the acceptable worship is, in all cases, worship from the mind. Our *thoughts* are what reach the Eternal Father. Our actions are worthless *without the active participation of our minds in the action*.

If then we sing a hymn of praise, and our thoughts are diverted to the notes — or to the sound of the organ—or to some outside influence — we may be guilty of singing words unacceptable to God. We might, quite unconsciously, fall under God's condemnation of Israel, repeated by Jesus in Matt. 15:8 as he rebuked the Scribes and Pharisees . . .

"This people draw nigh unto Me with their mouth and honoreth Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me."

May we worship Him in spirit and in truth!

Then we come to the second great function of our meeting together, the reading of His Word. Surely no one can underestimate the value to us of the Holy Scriptures, or of the reading of them. We know that they are the basis of all our hope.

The Word of God is to us "life itself." The reading of it is our daily food without which we would very soon perish. Surely no one lacks reverence for this Book. But do we lack reverence for the *reading of it*? Has the reading of it become mechanical at this meeting?

We read it every day. Is it possible that familiarity has bred contempt; not for the Word, but contempt for the *reading of it*? In other words, are we keeping our minds on the reading?

This Word of God is God speaking to man; *God speaking to us*, through the brother who is reading. If God were to speak forth to us in the thundering voice that shook the earth around Sinai, we would reverence His words. And He *is* speaking to us from the pages of this Book just as surely as He did to the children of Israel from the smoking mountain. Would we fidget then? Write? Would we whisper? Thumb through a book? *Would we*, if God were speaking?

We have sung His praise, we have read His Word. We are ready to approach Him directly in prayer.

Volumes could be written about acceptable prayer. But our thoughts today are not upon the brother whose duty it is to lead the prayer, but on the rest of us who are *following* the prayer. The question is, *are* we following him? Are we concentrating upon the brother's appeal to the Heavenly Father? Are our thoughts with his, arising unto God as a sweet-smelling savor?

Or are we standing with bowed head, *thinking of something else*? Are we standing there chafing, because the prayer is long? Perhaps we are tired. Perhaps we are hungry. Is our mind upon the worship of God?

We know, from the "Law of Moses," that the incense being burned on the Golden Altar is the prayers of all the saints arising to God. We recall the care required in the preparation of the incense. Each ingredient measured carefully, each ingredient pure and fresh, all ingredients blended in just the right way to make a pleasing odor to the Almighty Deity.

The incense is the type. Our prayers are the antitype. What are the ingredients of the antitype? *Thoughts*, thoughts that you and I have are mingled with the thoughts of the brother that is leading the prayer. Are they *on the prayer*? Remember the warning:

"Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savor" (Eccl. 10:1).

So a discordant thought could be a putrid odor to our Heavenly Father, in our incense of prayer. Our thoughts are mingled; God reads our every thought. We stand exposed and open before the God of all the earth.

The Lord has called us to come and serve Him. What incomparable honor has been bestowed upon us that we have been called! We, on our part, have *chosen* to obey His commandments, and have related ourselves to the promises. We have *elected* to strive for an Eternal Life of praise and glorification of the Almighty God.

How *dare* we fret if the service is long! We spend little enough time in His service. We are dedicated to a life of service, a *life-time* in this life, and an eternity in the life to come. Yet we quibble if the service is ten minutes too long! Of a life time, we spend a very small amount of it here. Let us remember the words of gentle sorrow and reproach in the garden of Gethsemane:

"What, could ye not watch with me one hour?"

We do not plan to say much regarding the exhortations. In hymns and in prayer we are speaking to God. We dare, through Jesus, approach the Almighty God. In the reading of the Word, God is speaking to man, to us.

But the exhortation is man speaking to man. Not that the exhortation is not important. We are commanded to exhort one another, and so much the more as we see the day approaching. And the exhortation is the result of study and meditation on the life-giving Word.

The exhortations are designed to help us be more pleasing to God, to be more profitable servants, and to enable us to run more surely the race for Eternal Life.

Let us give careful thought now to the most important part of our meeting, The Memorial Supper. And let us give thought as to *why* we do these things.

The first reason is, of course, we are commanded to do it. "Do this as oft as ye meet in memory of me," Jesus said. So we take the bread, and we break it as his body was broken on the cross—broken on the cross to declare the righteousness of God.

In condemning that body of flesh, even though he had committed no sin, it proved that God was just in demanding death of flesh, even of His perfect Son, because he too possessed a body of flesh such as Adam had.

His blood was shed, because the "blood is the life," and life was required because he possessed the sin-cursed flesh, the mortal quality inherited from his mother Mary, and David and Adam.

And he became our sacrifice for sin, as a representative of a dying race. As our sacrifice, he became our Passover Lamb. We recall that Israel in Egypt had to eat the flesh of their Passover Lamb, and had to sprinkle the blood of the Lamb on the doorpost—upon the *place of entering in*.

So we this morning in this bread that we break, will eat the flesh of our Passover Lamb, that we may be saved from the Angel of Death. This passover Lamb that we eat is the body of Christ, for Jesus said of the bread, "This is my body."

When we eat of this bread we partake of the body of Christ. We signify that we are *part*; having partaken of it, we become part of the body of Christ. For all the saints are the composite Body of Christ.

So, when we drink this wine, which is the symbol of his blood (the blood of the Passover Lamb, to be sprinkled on the doorpost), we recall that in all sacrifice the blood was used for purification. It was sprinkled on the Altar, it was sprinkled on the service of the Altar, and even on the Priests to purify them.

So with his blood which we drink are we purified, and we drink it each week, *in symbol*, sprinkling us within, and purifying us within, *if we keep in mind what we are doing*.

It is within that we need purification, for it is that that cometh out of a man that defileth a man. It's our thoughts that come out, and we know the natural thoughts of man are desperately wicked. So with the sprinkling of his blood do we cleanse our thoughts, *if we keep in mind what we are doing*.

Great blessing is available to us in this period set aside for a Memorial to Jesus—great help in our effort to be pleasing to God. For we can have purification of the mind and heart through the memory of him that was perfect.

Therein lies a question. Do we avail ourselves of this provided time—*all* of it? Do we center our minds on Christ while the emblems are being passed? Not just when they touch our lips, but the whole period from the Breaking of the Bread on the table, until the cup has been returned and the table covered?

This *can* be the most beneficial period in our week if we use it as it was intended—to contemplate the beauties of Jesus, his perfection, love, kindness, obedience, and gentleness. Contrast

ourselves to that picture, then this wine that we drink can obtain for us the result of which it symbolises, purification of our thoughts, our mind, our hearts.

It can also bring about a regeneration of the spirit within us by our contact with Jesus and His Father, and His Word. At no time are the forces of regeneration greater than at this service, in which we have gathered with the specific purpose of remembering Jesus, with the assurance that where the twos and the threes are gathered together there will he be in their midst.

And what is this "spirit" that we are talking about? It is that feeling that we have about things, our sense of values, in relation to the Truth, as opposed to the world; the way we feel toward each other, and toward God, and His kingdom. Our spirit has to do with humility, reverence, brotherly love.

This is the period for regeneration. "Renew a right spirit within us," is our prayer; a spirit in harmony with God and His plan is our desire. The spirit can be smothered by cares, adversities, by pleasure, or by neglect. And the spirit can be regenerated here, *if we keep in mind what we are doing in this service.*

But we have an even more urgent requirement to contemplate before we take the bread and wine. We are thinking of the words of the apostle Paul in the well-known 11th ch. of 1st Corinthians:

"Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."

Let a man examine himself! What a task! What do we find? Just go back for the last six days. Note all the things that we did because of God, and the Truth. Then, all the things that we did *for the flesh*. See how we tally up! We are each the judge of ourself in this examination. Judge truly, honestly—do we stand condemned in our own eyes?

Add it all up; this is the time for examination. This is the time for judgment. Out of this recognition of our shortcomings will come all the desired blessings; a renewal of a right spirit; getting back on the straight path; adjusting our value; adjusting our feeling about things—our spirit, if you will.

From the adjustment that we make here this morning, can come the control of our minds, and our thoughts, which will alter and correct our lives. Thus are we purified.

Moreover in judging ourselves we will acquire another blessing, for Paul said in v. 31: "For if we will judge ourselves, *we shall not be judged.*"

If we do not judge ourselves, we lose all the value of regeneration of the spirit within us; we may be partaking unworthily; and we do not escape the judgment of the Lord.

Let's judge ourselves honestly, and reap the reward of a renewal of the mind, that we may be more pleasing to God. Let's maintain an active mind, actively contemplating the things that are transpiring. Let's keep our thoughts in hand, fresh and pure, that mingled with the thoughts of all the saints, they may arise unto God as a sweet-smelling savour.

Let's strive with all our might, to consciously be more reverent during our meeting together, that in glorifying God, we may glorify Him to the utmost; that in praising God, we may praise Him to the greatest; that in worship, we may be pleasing in His sight. For, my brethren and sisters—"Ye are the Temple of the Living God!"
—W.H.
