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Worship in the Days of the New Testament

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"God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). From this we learn that to worship God and have our worship accepted, it must be according to truth. God's word is said to be truth, so it is another way of saying that we must do by faith that which comes from hearing God's word. Now our hearts may dictate many things and all be wrong. Paul's heart dictated many things to him, which he did. Yet, when he heard God and obeyed him (walking by faith, not by what he thought), he learned that he was persecuting Jesus (Acts 9:4). "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which things I also did in Jerusalem; and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priest; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them" (Acts 26:9-10). Yes, Paul's dictates of his heart, or what he thought he should do, led him to persecute the Son of God whom he sought to serve.

When a man worships God according to the dictates of his own heart, he is being directed by the creed of a man and not the truth of God, which gives him faith to please God. Jesus said of those who sought to serve him while on earth, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth 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 15:8-9).

The creeds and commandments of man will not produce the faith which is essential to acceptable worship to God. The dictates, thoughts and creeds of man constitute completely vain worship according to no less authority than the Son of God. Man does not, has never, nor will he ever have the right to worship God according to the dictates of his own heart!

What about us today? Jesus said that he has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). Paul said that the "Gospel of Christ" was God's power to save, not the dictates of men (Romans 1:16). The Hebrew writer said that Jesus is the "author of eternal salvation to those who obey him" (Hebrews 5:9). He is not the author of eternal salvation to those who worship God according to the dictates of their own hearts. Paul said that if one of the apostles, an angel, or any man preached any other Gospel than the Gospel which he preached, such a one would be cursed. This was the Gospel Paul received from God (Galatians 1:8-12), not the one he preached when the "thought within himself". For while he thought within himself he made "havoc" of the Lord's Church (Acts 8:3).

All those who do not obey the gospel of Christ will be lost (II Thessalonians 1:7-9). Man's heart will never dictate this Gospel or the faith which comes from the study of this gospel. Jesus died to give us the Gospel of Christ (I Corinthians 15:1-4). Man does not have the right to worship God according to the dictates of his own heart, and he will be lost if he does.