

Unacceptable Worship (Part 2)

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[0:00] Amen. We've been studying the importance of true worship in the life of every believer.

! Again, our operative verse in John chapter 4, we'll say this until we get it memorized. Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.

And Jesus said to her, Woman, believe me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know.

We worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.

For such people the Father seeks to be his worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth.

[1:07] Now, we've already mentioned four biblical reasons for worship. And as a matter of review, those four are.

Scripture requires it. All of life is affected by it. It is the major theme of redemptive history, and God commands it.

God commands true worship. And under the banner of true worship, we have actually been looking at four kinds of unacceptable worship.

Three types we've already covered. The first three types of unacceptable worship are the worship of false gods. You don't want to do that.

Worshiping, wrongly worshiping the true God. You don't want to do that either. Worshiping God in a self-styled manner.

[2:12] Well, we covered all three of those last week, and I promised that we would cover the fourth one tonight, which is what we're going to do. And the fourth one is this.

Worshiping the true God with a wrong attitude. A wrong heart. True worship is a matter of the heart. If our heart isn't right, our worship isn't right. Now, the first three ways to worship God are almost theoretical for us.

But this last one concerning a wrong attitude, that gets a little bit closer to home. We can all fall victim to that, can't we?

This is where we sometimes live. We can all say amen to the first three points. We don't worship false gods. We don't worship idols.

[3:13] We don't worship in a self-styled manner. But now the question arises, do we worship God with the right heart attitude?

And if we don't approach God with the right heart attitude, our worship is unacceptable. It's really not even worship. And it's not worship just as much as those first three categories don't qualify as worship.

So attitude is everything. Now, to understand this last point, we're going to be quite a bit in the Old Testament tonight.

It is in the Old Testament, actually, that there is a death blow that is dealt with legalism and formalism and ritualism. In the book of Malachi, we don't spend a lot of time there.

But the last book of the Old Testament, it is there that we learn that worship had become just a function to the people of God.

[4:25] It was just a mere function. They were just going through the motions of worship. But their heart was not in it.

And actually, from Malachi to Matthew, I think it was about 400 years. Then we're going to run head on into the Pharisees. Well, that carried over in all those centuries to them.

That describes the Pharisees. But listen to this out of the book of Malachi, chapter 1, starting in verse 6. A son honors his father, and a servant his master.

Then if I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my respect, says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests who despise my name?

But you say, how have we despised your name? This is obviously God talking, right? You are presenting defiled food upon my altar.

[5:34] But you say, how have we defiled you? In that you say, the table of the Lord is to be despised. But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is that not evil?

And when you present the lame and sick, is that not evil? Why not offer it to your governor? That really struck me.

Would he be pleased with you? Would he receive you kindly, says the Lord of hosts? But now, will you not entreat God's favor, that he may be gracious to us?

With such an offering on your part, will he receive any of you kindly, says the Lord of hosts? Oh, that there were one among you who would shut the gates, that you might not uselessly kindle fire on my altar.

I am not pleased with you, says the Lord of hosts, nor will I accept an offering from you.

[6:36] I'm going to accept their worship. For from the rising of the sun, even to its setting, my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense is going to be offered to my name, and a grain offering that is pure.

For my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts. But you are profaning it, in that you say the table of the Lord is defiled, and as for its fruit, its food is to be despised.

You also say, my, how tiresome it is, and you disdainfully sniff at it, says the Lord of hosts. And you bring what was taken by robbery, and what is lame or sick, so you bring the offering.

Should I receive that from your hands, says the Lord? But cursed be the swindling who has a male in his flock, and vows it, but sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord.

For I am a great king, says the Lord of hosts, and my name is feared among the nations. Now there's a little disconnect, isn't there? We're New Testament Christian Gentiles.

[7:44] We're back in Judaism, Old Testament. But the message comes through here. They were worshiping with the wrong heart attitude. There's no other way to put it.

The people in Malachi's day were participating in unacceptable worship, and in many different ways. Central to this was their offer of inferior animals for the daily sacrifice.

If they had a blind animal that was a little value, they took it down to the temple. Offered it for worship. In other words, they were giving God what they couldn't use anyway.

Hey, let's just go down and give this to God, and we'll score some points. They thought it was a way to reduce the inventory of diseased animals, of injured animals, and at the same time, they're going to gain credit with God for participating in worship.

They were offering lame animals to God, and the Spirit of God who wrote these words basically said, The next time you go to the governor's mansion to pay your taxes, offer him a worthless animal and see what he does to you.

[9:06] That's in essence what they said. In other words, they were giving to God what they would not dare give an earthly ruler. I mean, when you send in your taxes to IRS, just take out a little bit and say, I'm just going to pay you this much this year.

Let's see what happens. You know, let's see what happens. God does not accept worship that is offered in an inferior manner.

God wants a pure offering by which his name is honored among the nations of the earth. Now, under the old covenant, they were to bring a lamb for sacrifice that was without spot or blemish.

In other words, they were to bring the very best of the flock, and this was the precise thing that they had ceased to do in the days of Malachi. What they were doing was a profanity to God.

They were treating worship as a contemptible thing. They were tired of worshiping in the prescribed manner. So here we have the greatest king of the universe, and the people were trying to worship him in a manner that was not even befitting an earthly king who was himself a mere man and covered in the pollution of sin.

[10:35] Now, why would they do this? Malachi says it was because worship had become weariness to them. They were tired of it.

In our language today, worship had become a big pain in the neck. It was burdensome. It was boring. It was time-consuming. It interfered with other things that were viewed as more profitable or interesting.

It interfered with the Super Bowl. Whoops. I got into the new covenant. I'm sorry. Does this describe the church today? Does this describe Christianity today?

The people in the Old Testament went through the form and the function, but their hearts were not in it. This led to the people treating worship as a boring exercise in futility.

Malachi 3, we read this. 3.13-15. Your words have been arrogant against me, says the Lord. Yet you say, what have we spoken against you?

[11 : 44] You have said it is vain to serve God. And what profit is it that we have kept his charge and that we have walked in mourning before the Lord of hosts?

So now we call the arrogant blessed, not only are the doers of wickedness built up, but they also test God and escape.

Now, we've got to remember something. These were the people of God in their day. These were the true people of God.

And they were worshipping the true God. But they were worshipping in a manner that was completely unacceptable.

And we go back to their heart. Condition of their heart. Their heart was simply not in it. So this begs the question.

[12 : 40] When you and I worship, whether privately, in our closet, corporately, here in church, when we gather together, are our hearts truly in it?

And you look inside and ask yourselves that. And I dare say, I know there's not a person in this room that worships a false God. I'm sure we don't reduce God to an idol or an image.

We don't invent styles of worship, self-styled worship. I have no doubt that we all want to do it by the book. But then we come back to that one fundamental question.

Is our heart right before God? Is it right? Do we give God our very best? Is our heart filled with awe and reverence?

Spurgeon said that we would never stand before the English king and play with a feather. Have any of us ever come before God and played with a feather?

[13 : 47] I'm going to have lunch with the governor this week. I think I'll take a feather in there. Probably not. Do we really give God our undivided attention when it comes to worship?

Or does our mind turn to other things? Does our mind turn to the football game? Does our mind turn to where we're going to lunch today? And is Don going to get us out in time to really have time to eat our meal?

Or do we have to hurry through it before we get home with our nap? Listen to the words of Amos chapter 5. God makes a very definitive statement concerning the state of worship in his day in Amos 5, 21.

I hate. Look at this God's talking. God said that. I hate. I reject. Your festivals.

Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. I can just almost hear the Lord saying that to those people. Even though you offer up to me burnt offerings, and your grain offerings, I will not accept them.

[14 : 59] I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. Take away from me the noise of your songs. I will not even listen to the sound of your hearts.

But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Their worship was unacceptable.

And God rejected it. Just as he would reject any and all unacceptable worship. Now just how unacceptable was it?

God ultimately made the people of Israel go into exile because of their unacceptable worship offered to him.

Can you imagine if he held the church to the same standard today? Well, you didn't worship me acceptably Sunday. You're going into exile for 30 or 40 years.

[15 : 59] Be thankful that we all live in an age of grace. In an age of mercy. Hosea chimes in. He had to deal with a people whose hearts were not right in respect to their worship of the Lord.

In Hosea 6, verse 4. What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? For your loyalty is like a morning cloud and like the dew which goes away early.

There I have hewn them in pieces by the prophets. I have slain them by the words of my mouth. And the judgments on you are like the light that goes forth. For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice.

Well, that's profound. And in knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. I mean, think of a Hebrew. They had a whole system of offering sacrifices and burnt offerings.

It was with them for 1600 years. It was, I mean, Henry Ford didn't invent the assembly line. The Jews did. It was an assembly line of animals going through there.

[17 : 20] One of the most poignant sections of Scripture dealing with the theme of unacceptable worship is found in the writings of Isaiah, chapter 1, verse 11 to 18.

What are your multiplied sacrifices to me, says the Lord? I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat fed cattle.

And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs, or goats. When you come to appear before me, who requires of you this trampling of my courts?

Bring your worthless offerings no longer. Incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies.

I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. We have this word again. I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts.

[18 : 23] They have become a burden to me. I am weary of bearing them. So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you.

Yes, though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. Wash yourselves. Make yourselves clean.

Remove the evil of your deeds from my sight. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good. Seek justice.

Reprove the ruthless. Defend the orphan. Plead for the widow. Come now and let us reason together, says the Lord.

And then a very famous passage. Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be white as snow.

Though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool. Just like wool.

[19 : 23] God issues an indictment of their worship. No other way to put it. One of the strongest rebukes in the Word of God.

Probably the strongest rebuke on false worship. Or misguided worship in the Word of God. God had ordained the sacrifice of animals.

Why? They were a picture of Christ on Calvary. You know, all the way back into Leviticus. He was drawing them a picture, a portrait. Of the Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary.

But they had grown a burden to God. Because their worship had become unacceptable. And God says, I'm not going to hear you anymore.

I'm turning off my ears. I'm not going to listen. But He also calls them to return to the manner of true, acceptable worship.

[20 : 25] Now the people of the Old Testament were worshiping the right God. They had that right. But they were worshiping with the wrong attitude.

And because of that, they were cut off. And their worship was unacceptable to God. Wouldn't accept it. Scary deal. Well, we don't want to leave out the New Testament people, do we?

So in Mark's Gospel, chapter 7, verse 6, we read this. And he said to them, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far away from me.

My brothers, if we worship a false God, or if we worship the true God wrongly, or if we worship God in a self-styled manner of our own choosing, or if we worship God with a wrong attitude, it is unacceptable.

God does not accept that worship. And that has impact, doesn't it? It impacts us now. It will impact us in eternity.

[21 : 42] It has tremendous impact for our souls. God does not accept worship offered in these ways. He just doesn't. Now, we've spent a lot of time over a couple weeks developing this theme of unacceptable worship.

And imagine how depressing it would be if we just shut her down for the night. You know, well, let's don't leave with unacceptable worship. Let's consider for a few moments what acceptable worship is.

And perhaps the defining passage on acceptable worship is found in the book of Psalms. Psalm 24. Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord?

And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart.

Who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood? And has not sworn deceitfully? He shall receive a blessing from the Lord.

[22:56] And righteousness from the God of His salvation. This is the generation of those who seek Him. Who seek your face.

What a defining message of true acceptable worship. That is acceptable worship right there.

And we can sum it up this way. Accept the worship is the key to understanding who we are in Christ. It's the key that unlocks the door to Christ.

We've been talking about this for seven weeks. It is the key to understanding our salvation. Let me put it another way. And this is a principle that you need to memorize.

There will be a test next week. The goal of salvation is to produce acceptable worshipers. The goal of salvation is to produce acceptable worshipers.

[24:06] And you know, you go to the churches of America in the West. You ask them, what's the goal of salvation? If that even makes the list, it'll be 10 or 15 or 20 down.

Yet if you and I are truly saved, then we are acceptable worshipers. And the reverse is true. If we are an acceptable worshiper, we are truly saved.

As you examine your worship, you can make a determination even as to your relationship with the Lord. Our worship reveals to us if we're saved or lost.

Depending on how we worship. Depending on how we worship. And I mean, if your prayer life is, you know, bless this food, then don't let it go to my middle. Or now lay me down to sleep.

You know, re-examine all that. To support this, we need to return to the text in John chapter 4. But an hour is coming.

[25:08] This is Jesus. An hour is coming. And then the Lord adds this. And now is. When the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.

You know, interesting, just a few years ago, we went through the seeker movement. Boy, that was a big deal. Everybody wanted to get on board. We've got churches in this town that are seeker-friendly churches. There's one seeker in Scripture.

There's one seeker. And it's the Father. The Father seeks who are going to be His true worshipers. That's what the Father does.

He's seeking true worshipers. And that verse 23, you have a description of a Christian. A description of a follower of Christ Jesus.

The Father sent His Son to seek and save those who were lost. You know, why did He do that?

[26:17] Why did He do that? And the verse holds the answer. To produce acceptable worshipers. To produce acceptable worshipers.

You go ask people in churches across America, you know, God saved you? Oh yeah, yeah, God saved me. Okay. You've been redeemed. Oh yeah, I've been redeemed. Why did God do that? Keep me out of hell.

That's a byproduct. That just comes along. You know, that's just thrown in there. It's a byproduct of our salvation.

Neither have we been saved to be healthy, wealthy, and wise. God saved us so that we could worship Him in an acceptable manner for how long?

Forever. For eternity. I had a dear friend of mine. Good guy. He said something to me 30 years ago and I can't get it out of my head.

[27:19] Reformed guy. And he said, well, when I read about what we're going to do in heaven in the book of Revelation, he said, it just sounds boring to me. I mean, all we're going to do is just worship that just really sounds boring to me.

That still bothers me. Does that bother you, Pastor? That bothers me to this day. He thought it sounded boring. Anything but that.

This verse tells us that the Father seeks is out here seeking after acceptable worshipers. In the book of Acts, Paul was accused of making people worship God.

They said, well, you're just making us worship in your own manner. What an endyvon. He was teaching people to worship God as revealed to him by Jesus Christ. God came to him, taught him,

instructed him, and that's the kind of worship Paul was teaching.

Let me look at a series of Scriptures. We don't have to spend time discussing them. They really do speak for themselves. After coming into the house, they saw the child with Mary, his mother, and they fell to the ground and worshipped him.

[28:44] You remember that? I mean, you had you had magi? How many magi were there?

Don't yell out three. We don't know how many there were. Don't yell out three. Don't yell out three. I would have felt bad if you had done that. And the shepherds, shepherds came to him first.

It was first announced to shepherds. That's just like God, isn't it? They came. The most despised class in Israel couldn't even go into the synagogue or the temple.

Why not? Well, they stunk. Stuck like sheep. They came and they bowed and they worshipped.

Worship is what happens when believers come into the presence of the Lord.

Even when he is a baby laying in a food trough. And that's what a manger is. Even when you are a magi, which is an exalted person, not really a king.

[29:49] We call them the three kings. But these were exalted individuals. They bowed down and worshipped him. Matthew 8.2 When Jesus came down from the mountain, large crowds followed him.

They're walking around following him. And then one in the crowd comes forward. Who is he? And a leper came to him and bowed down before him.

A leper. All the rest of them were standing around watching. This leper bowed down. And the act of bowing down is an act of worship given to the Lord.

We talked about that in your closet, right? Try it out. Get on your face before the Lord. Later in Matthew, it is recorded that Christ walked on water and stilled the storm.

Perfect exercise over nature. God's exercise over his creation. And so doing, the disciples recognized who Jesus was and listened to their reaction in Matthew 14.33.

[31:06] And those who were in the boat worshipped him. They see him out there walking on water and then he stills the storm and it says, they worshipped him and they declared, you are certainly God's son.

Now, wherever it is and whenever it is, the immediate response to Christ is to be worshipped.

Where to worship him. And it just really gets me when some televangelists will talk about going to heaven and visiting with Jesus and coming back and he said, one of them said, I comforted Jesus. He was distraught. He thought he'd fail. And I said, no, no, you haven't failed. We've got everything under control down there. Let me tell you, that man has never seen Jesus and he may never to the great white throne judgment.

I don't know. I'm not his judge. Our response is to be like John. Now, here we've got the beloved disciple. I think he was the youngest.

I don't know how old he was. He may have been a teenager. I don't know. I personally, I can't prove this by Scripture, I personally think that God, that Christ watched after John.

[32:24] He's the youngest. First time ever been away from home. Traveling with these fishermen. Older guys. I think the Lord made sure John got an extra portion on his plate.

I think that he got a nice place nearest the fire. And if it really got cold, I think Jesus got up in the middle of the night and went over and gave John his blanket. He covered him up.

The beloved disciple. That's what John refers to. John and John, John in the Gospel of John could never bring himself to say John. He just said the beloved disciple. And don't be critical of that.

That's from the Holy Spirit. You come to Revelation. Beloved disciple. And he sees him. He sees the resurrected Christ.

The same one that he's told. They say, well, I went and visited with Jesus in heaven. That's the resurrected God of creation. The God who created us and redeems us and sustains us.

[33:26] And John sees him. The beloved disciple. The Scriptures say he fell at his feet as if he were dead.

He fell. Right before the Lord. Right before his feet. When a man comes back and tells me, I went to heaven and I fell at his feet like I was dead, then I might listen just a smidgen and then turn about.

I think we're going to do the same. I have people say all the time, oh, and I get to heaven, I get all kinds of questions. No, you don't. You don't have any questions.

You might think you do, but you don't. After his resurrection, look how the disciples reacted whenever they came into his presence. And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them.

And they came up and they took hold of his feet. Now, how do you grab someone's feet? You're going to be laying down, right? They took hold of his feet and they worshipped him.

[34:33] What a change when they're all sitting around in the campfire and, you know, cooking fish and telling stories and now they come up and they bow down and they grab his feet and they worship him.

And then in Matthew 28, the 11 disciples, Judas has gone to his reward. They proceeded to Galilee to the mountain which Jesus had designated and when they saw him, they worshipped him. It's a simple theme of Scripture. Simple theme of Scripture. Believers are first and foremost worshippers of the true God in an acceptable manner.

That is the essence of what it means to be sought by the Father. If you are a true worshipper of God and that's where your heart is, chances are God sought you and found you and brought you into the body of Christ.

And if you're having trouble with your worship, go to examine yourself. Go back and examine yourself and get before the Lord and tell him that. He already knows it. So you might as well talk to him about it.

[35:50] I know I have. But again I say, we have been redeemed to worship. Let me close with this.

You remember the great passage in John chapter 9 where Jesus healed the man born blind? When the Pharisees heard this, they confronted the man trying to get him to level a charge against Jesus. They want him to be their witness so they can issue an indictment because Jesus had done a horrible thing. He had created eyes for this man on the Sabbath.

Can you imagine? Well, the formerly blind man, he wouldn't do it. They told him, I'm not going to do that. So they put him out of the temple.

Now guys, that's huge in that culture. That's huge. That meant he was cut off from the religious life of Israel. And by doing that, they are symbolically telling him and his family and his friends and everybody standing around, he is now condemned to hell.

[37:11] Of course, he had one thing going for him. Who condemned him? Well, the religious leaders of Israel did. They consigned him to hell. Did they have the authority to do that? Nope.

And most of them are there now and they haven't seen him. They haven't bumped into him. Jesus heard all this and the scriptures tell us he started looking for the guy.

He knew where he was but he was seeking that man, that very man that had been born blind. He finds him and he asked him a question.

He said, do you believe in the Son of Man? A messianic title. We all know that. And this man that had been born blind and now could see, can you imagine?

Born blind. He's 38 years old or so. And now he could see? That's what a tree looks like. I wasn't sure. He finds him and the man speaks.

[38:16] Jesus said, do you believe in the Son of Man? And he says, who is he, Lord, that I may believe in him? And by the way, that's a form of saying that I may commit my life to him.

I may trust him and commit the rest of my life to him. And Jesus said to him, you have both seen him and he is the one who is talking with you.

I'm always amazed even nowadays the liberal camp, they write books on that Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah. and yet he told the blind man and he told the woman at the well.

She said, I know Messiah is coming. I will speak to you and he. He told this man, do you believe in the Son of Man? Who is he, Lord? He's talking to you and you're looking at him.

Now listen to the man's reaction. And he said, Lord, Lord, I believe. I trust. I commit my life to you.

[39:24] And then it says, and he worshipped him. And he worshipped him. That's where we're at in our Christian walk.

We need to be worshippers. Time is short. The instant that man became a believer, he worshipped God. And God, in his case, was standing right before him in human flesh and taking upon himself human flesh.

My brothers, my message tonight is we too need to be true worshippers of God. Be true worshippers.