

Unacceptable Worship (Part 1)

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[0:00] We're going to continue our look tonight at how to worship the Lord.

We're going to focus on the Lord's teaching in John chapter 4. You remember the exchange with the woman at the well of Sychar, which was a village in Samaria.

Remember Samaritan for a half-breed. Verse 20, Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is a place where men ought to worship.

Jesus said to her, Woman, believe me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem would 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 worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.

[1:05] For such people the Father seeks to be his worshippers. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth. This is the key passage in the New Testament on worship, and we're going to be spending some time in it.

In this passage tonight, we see eight times the word worship is used. Appropriate worship is what God desires for his church.

And we have been privileged to live in America, where seemingly there is a church building on every corner. But one has to wonder how much true worship actually occurs in those buildings. We said last time that worship is homage paid to a superior being. Christian worship is the giving of respect and honor to God.

As believers, we have been called to be worshipping people. And we're presently looking at the importance of worship. And we've already discussed, just last week, the fact that there are four reasons why worship is essential.

[2:24] And those four we've discovered, were that Scripture requires it, all of life as affected by it, it is the major theme of redemptive history, and God commands it.

Now, that alone is sufficient, of course. God commands that we worship him. There are two major ways to worship God.

One way is to worship him by exercising acceptable worship. The other way is unacceptable worship, to worship the true God in an unacceptable manner.

And put simply, if our worship is unacceptable, then any group that practices unacceptable worship is not part of the kingdom of God.

And if our worship is acceptable, then I believe we can say we are members of the kingdom of God. There's no middle ground here. There's no place to run and say, well, I'm going to take a little softer view here.

[3:38] And many today, and especially the liberal church, would argue, and I've heard this, that worship is acceptable if it is done in a sincere manner.

Just as long as the person is sincere, has a sincere heart. But the Bible doesn't teach that. It doesn't teach that.

And last week, we talked about one kind of unacceptable worship, and that was the worship of false gods. God does not accept into his kingdom those who worship false deities.

Plain and simple, black and white. These can be false gods, or idols made of created material, idols made of gold, of wood, of stone.

Anyone who worships false gods is excluded from God's kingdom. It is unacceptable worship, and God does not accept that kind of worship.

[4:43] The second form of unacceptable worship that we're going to look at tonight is worshipping the true God in the wrong way. And that, too, is unacceptable.

Many worship false gods, but tonight we're going to talk about worshipping the true God, but in the wrong way. The worship of the true God is specifically outlined in Scripture.

God has given us the blueprint. Now, the chief way people worship the true God in an unacceptable way is to reduce him to an image. When God becomes the product of our imagination, he becomes an idol in the mind of the person trying to worship him.

And if you want to raise the hair on the back of my neck, then say something like, well, God, as I perceive him to be. I've heard that, and it just, that will really set me off.

And then they go on from there in describing or attributing characteristics to God that God does not possess. And it doesn't really matter how we perceive God to be.

[6:01] What matters is who God really is and the manner in which he has revealed himself to us through Scripture. If our description of God conflicts with the revealed Word of God as to his person, then no matter how sincerely we may be, we are worshipping God in an unacceptable manner.

I remember hearing Dr. Swindoll years ago. He was at a conference for young people. He said, a 17-year-old boy, raised his hand, we're taking questions. He said, he asked me something.

I've never been asked in my ministry. He said, when you pray, in your mind, what is your vision of God? He had never been asked that.

And he said, I had to think about that. And he said, well, I'll tell you this, when I was young, I pictured God as an old grandfather with a long white beard, sitting in a chair, thrown, and he slumbered a lot.

and he had a big old club with a railroad spike and every now and then he would reach down and swap me with it because I did something wrong. But he said, as I've matured in my faith, he said, I have no mental image of God.

[7:22] God is spirit. We just read that passage. But that was real instructive from Dr. Swindoll. There is, in our day, global abuse of God being worshipped in a manner that is inconsistent with his character and with revealed truth.

Billions of people worship God in the wrong way. All of the world's religions worship in an unacceptable manner.

All of the cults worship in an unacceptable manner. Clearly, the occult worships in an unacceptable manner. And there is a third way in which our worship will not be accepted and that is worshipping God in a self-styled manner.

That is more than reducing him to an idol. That is reducing God to a small creature in a box labeled how I choose to worship.

And every now and then we take God out of that box. We open up the box and we take him out especially when we need something. Especially when we need something.

[8:41] That to me perfectly describes the charismatic televangelists. I hear them all the time telling people you can manipulate God.

You know, tell God what you want and you will have it. It's a manipulative religion. Man becomes the decision maker on how best to worship and what style of worship fits his preconceived notions concerning God.

We have a graphic example of this in Leviticus chapter 10. In that chapter we read of the ordination day of the two sons of Aaron the earthly high priest.

Now this was their first day to lead in the worship of Israel. It was also going to be their last day to serve as Levitical priests.

In Leviticus 10, 1-3, now Nadab and Abihu the sons of Aaron took their respective fire pans and after putting fire in them placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the Lord which he had not commanded them.

[10:07] You see trouble brewing? fire came and fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them and they died before the Lord.

Then Moses said to Aaron it is what the Lord spoke saying by those who come near to me I will be treated as holy. Have you drawn near to him today or this weekend?

He says I will be treated as holy and before all the people I will be honored. And then I think this is one of the most poignant sentences in the Bible.

So Aaron therefore kept silent. That just that'll preach. These two boys are dead. They served as Levitical priests for about 30 seconds.

And offered strange fire and God struck them dead. John MacArthur wrote a book a couple years ago called Strange Fire. Great book. Gave a seminar on it. Was attacked for it.

[11:17] You knew that would happen. I've still got four or five copies if anybody wants to borrow one. And if you don't want to borrow it I'll give it to you. Great book. Great book. There are some indications in the Bible We can't say that emphatically.

But we gain some insight when we read verse 8 and 9. The Lord then spoke to Aaron saying do not drink wine or strong drink neither you nor your sons with you when you come into the tent of meeting so that you will not die.

it is a perpetual statute throughout your generations. That to me is pretty emphatic that these guys may have been taking a nip or two. And they went in there inebriated with their own fire and offered it before the Lord.

Well suffice it to say for Nadab and Abihu this is not a good way to start your ministry. Neither is it a good way to end your ministry. The example here is that we do not worship God on our own terms. We worship Him based upon the revelation of Scripture. Paul asked that great question. What do the Scriptures say?

[12:45] I've used that so many times. Some of us say, I believe this, I believe it. I'll say, what do the Scriptures say? Quoting Paul. Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire.

Many today offer strange worship. Aren't we glad we live in a time of grace? Where God is long suffering?

And the only possible explanation as to why they are not consumed is that God is long suffering and we do live in an age of grace. But remember, judgment delayed is never judgment denied. We must follow the example of worship found in the Bible. Here's another example of worshipping God in a self-styled manner.

Out of Samuel, 1 Samuel. Now he waited seven days according to the appointed time set by Samuel, but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him.

[13:48] So Saul said, bring to me the burnt offering and the peace offerings. That's Saul. that wasn't the priest. And he offered the burnt offering.

As soon as he finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came. God's got perfect timing. And Saul went out to meet him and to greet him, but Samuel said, what have you done?

What have you done? And Saul said, because I saw that the people were scattering from me, blames the people, and you did not come within the appointed days, blames the priest, and that the Philistines were assembling, blames the Philistines.

Therefore I said, now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not asked the favor of the Lord. And then he says, so I forced myself and offered the burnt offering.

Samuel said to Saul, you have acted foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, for now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever, but now your kingdom shall not endure.

[15:10] The Lord has sought out for himself a man after his own heart, and the Lord has appointed him as ruler over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you. Well, that's David.

God will be worshipped by men who are after God's own heart, because they are the ones who will worship in spirit and truth.

Saul was removed as the king of Israel, and no one from his line would ever sit on that throne again. You cannot worship the true God by reducing him to an image, and you cannot worship God in a self-styled manner, as did Saul.

We have another example, and this one's really tragic in human terms. This has always just really touched my heart, and it's found again in Samuel, 2 Samuel this time, and it's the story of Uzzah. Remember Uzzah? I always kind of liked Uzzah. I was just one of us, you know. When the Ark of the Covenant was transported, it had to be done by the order of the Kohphites.

[16:25] They were a division of the Levitical priesthood set apart by God to transport the Ark. They never touched the Ark.

Ever. I mean, you know what can happen when you touch the Ark. You know, the Rangers of the Lost Ark. You saw that? There were big rings on the side, and they slid poles through the rings, and hoisted the Ark in that manner on their shoulders.

The Kohphites then transported the Ark in this manner, and Uzzah was a Kohphite. When it came time to transport the Ark in our story, Uzzah and his fellow Kohphites placed the Ark on the ox cart. Now, let me say, you're not supposed to put it on an ox cart. That was a forbidden mode of travel for the Ark. Why such a big deal out of this Ark that men built?

The Ark represented God's presence to the nation. It represented the presence of God and sinful men, no matter how sincere they may be, are not to manhandle God in a self-styled manner.

[17:47] Not to do that. The method of transporting the Ark came from the mind of fallen men. They said, hey, let's just put this on the ox cart. It'll be a lot easier than carrying this thing.

The Ark should never have been placed on an ox cart. And listen to what happened. They placed the Ark of God on a new cart that they might bring it to the house of Abinendab, which was on the hill, and Uzzah and Ahoh and the sons of Abinendab were leading the new cart.

So they bought it with the Ark of God, which was on the hill, and they were walking ahead of the ark. Meanwhile, David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the Lord with all kinds of instruments made of wood, and lyres, and harps, and tambourines, and castanets, and cymbals. But they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, and Uzzah reached out toward the Ark of God and took hold of it because the oxen tripped.

Can you picture that? The oxen stumbled, and the Ark's going like this, and Uzzah sees this, and he instinctively, and he's there to protect the Ark, he runs up to steady the Ark, and he touches it, and the anger of the Lord burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his irreverence, and he died there by the Ark of God.

[19:36] Listen about David. David became angry because of the Lord's outburst against Uzzah. I mean, can you kind of sympathize with this guy?

He's trained to protect the Ark, and now he does this, and he runs up there, and it's really easy to be sympathetic toward Uzzah. the oxen stumbled, it looks like the Ark is going to fall off the cart, and land in a bunch of dirt and mud.

Uzzah reaches out instinctively and attempts to steady the Ark to keep it from falling to the ground. God became angry and killed Uzzah on the spot.

So let's say some things here. First of all, Uzzah knew better. he'd been trained all of his life in the proper ways to transport the Ark.

As a Levite, he knew he was never to touch the Ark regardless of the circumstances. In trying to save the Ark from striking the ground, he intruded into God's commandment that God cannot be approached in a self-styled manner.

[20:56] even though we might look at a human that was good, he approached God and he touched the presence of God in a manner that was not acceptable.

He thought this up himself, self-styled. And let me say this, it would have been no sin for the Ark to strike the mud and dirt.

mud and dirt were doing precisely what God had created them to do. Nothing sinful about mud and dirt.

But God will not have contact with a sinner without a mediator. And we have a mediator, don't we? The Lord Jesus Christ. Uzzah would have come directly and intimately into contact with the living God and he was not qualified to do so.

[21:58] God struck him dead and at the same time struck fear into the hearts of everyone watching. And David was upset. He was mad.

And we might sympathize humanly with Uzzah, really, but he did a foolish thing. And it should have been on the Oscar to begin with. The Pharisees do the same thing in Matthew chapter 15.

Do the same thing. Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders?

For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread. them? And he answered and said to them, Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? So the Lord gives them this stinging rebuke.

These are the religious leaders of Israel. We talked about them yesterday morning a little bit. They asked Jesus, Why are you breaking the rules concerning worship? And he asked them, Why are you sinning against God?

[23:10] Jesus is telling them they are worshiping in a manner that is self-styled and dishonoring to the Lord. And then he goes on to give them an example and then levels this rebuke to them.

You hypocrites! Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you, the people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far away from me, but in vain do they worship me teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.

their worship was useless because they substituted the commandments of men for the truth of God. They made up all these rules of how to live, how best to keep from violating any of the commandments, the father of works, all based on tradition.

This is precisely what goes on in a lot of churches today. A lot of churches. I'm glad I don't dance, but I still haven't found that passage of scripture that says don't dance.

[24 : 12] I don't do it. They don't have any rhythm. We have traditions in our churches, don't we? The service is based upon foolish, human-devised pranks rather than following the blueprint of worship outlined by the Lord.

I remember Ed Young Jr. was teaching his whole church on sex. He put a king-sized bed on the platform. He ordered every married couple to go home and have relations at least five times that week.

From the pulpit. From the pulpit. I saw when I was coming through Fort Worth, they had a billboard and it said our sole reason for being here on earth is fellowship, basically.

which is not our sole reason. It's not our sole reason. Service is built upon foolishness, human-devised pranks rather than following the Lord.

Much of what passes for worship today is nothing more than an elaborate Ponzi scheme devised to separate men from their money. I tell you, those guys on TV, I could get worked up.

[25 : 30] I don't watch them, but I mean, I'm flipping channels and one of them said, you know, I've got four Rolls Royces. God has blessed me with four. Why don't you have any Rolls Royces?

Well, the reason is he's at the top of the Ponzi scheme. But people can't afford a Rolls Royce, they gave him his money. Not that I would want a Rolls Royce, I mean, good farm trucks are all you need.

But these guys are at the top of the Ponzi scheme. God is to be worshipped in spirit, and truth. He is not to be worshipped through religion or rituals or liturgies or other creations of fallen minds.

That's really what they are. The Roman church is filled with that and has been for millennia. for millennia. I remember Luther's day when they were selling the indulgences.

You could buy your way, you could buy, if you gave so much money, you got a relative out of purgatory and into heaven early. Luther would live it.

[26 : 42] They were at the top of the Ponzi scheme. The Lord Jesus further indicts the Pharisees in Matthew chapter 23. Listen to just these verses.

Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you tithe mint and dill and cumin and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law, justice and mercy and faithfulness.

that's what they ignored. That's what they turned their backs on. But these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel.

This is how fallen men worship in a fallen world by straining in a gnat and swallowing a camel. And Jesus goes on to pronounce them hypocrites even more.

Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence.

[27 : 48] You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

So you too outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous and say, if we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.

So you testify against yourselves that you are the sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up then the measure of the guilt of your fathers, you serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?

Do you ever wish Jesus wouldn't shade it? You know, just tell them how it is. And you notice he says here, they said, if we'd have been alive, we wouldn't have killed the prophets. They killed the

Son of God.

They're alive when Jesus is on earth. The prophets foretold of him coming, he comes and they kill him. So what we have here are categories of unacceptable worship.

[29:14] You cannot worship false gods. You cannot worship the true God by reducing him to an idol. You cannot worship the true God in a self-styled manner.

In other words, you can't just make up worship as you go. There's a blueprint. It's called the Word of God. We don't make it up. Our worship must conform to that prescribed in Scripture.

There's a fourth kind of unacceptable worship. That is to worship the true God with a wrong attitude. your heart must be right for your worship to be right.

Everything else was secondary. The heart is where we truly live. Most likely none of us have ever offered worship to God falsely by the first three kinds of unacceptable worship.

But the fourth kind is really getting personal. It's hitting us where we live. That we might worship with a wrong attitude. Do we worship the true God with a right attitude?

[30:32] And if we don't, it is unacceptable worship. Now, we've spent a considerable amount of time going over the first three modes of unacceptable worship. The fourth one, worshipping God with a wrong attitude, is going to be longer than the same amount of time we just spent with the first three.

So, it seemed to me this was a natural time to break. We're going to get home early tonight and pick it up at this point next time.