

The Kind of Worship God Desires, Part 1

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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It seems to me that this may be the right time to address the subject of worship. I want to say at the outset that I am grateful to the Lord for His direction in helping us here at Grace Church to remain a worshiping church when the evangelical church around us is going in the opposite direction.

There are two things that kill worship. One is man-centeredness and the other is pragmatism. Both of those have come to dominate what is called evangelicalism. Our church has not fallen victim to those, to either of them. We have no interest in buying into pragmatism, that is the idea that we will do whatever works, whatever produces the effect that we want, nor have we bought into the idea that the church needs to restructure itself to please men. But we are an island, I think, in a fast moving sea around us that is boiling over with pragmatism and man-centeredness.

As a result, the evangelical movement today has largely abandoned true worship. Oh there seems to be more and more, quote/unquote worship music, sort of the last gasps of someone who is unable to worship while worship quote/unquote music increases, worship in reality decreases. It seems to me that the evangelical church is actually abandoning worship, true worship. Or maybe we could say it another way, the evangelical church has decided to worship the culture, that's pragmatism. Or to worship the unbeliever, that's man-centeredness.

Or maybe to worship their clever leader, the church is now interested in finding out what the non-worshiper wants, the one who has no relationship to God whatsoever. And the church is ready to redefine itself in the direction of the non-worshiper. In fact, churches measure their success on how many non-worshippers they can get in their building on Sunday. They count them very carefully. And they write books on how to get more non-worshippers into your worship service. The more the better. So that the non-worshiper becomes sovereign in defining what the church does.

This is hardly what Scripture calls us to. The Word of God calls us to God-centered, spiritual worship. The illusion is that this man-centered, pragmatic, non-worshiping assembly of people called a church has the power to change people's lives, that a non-worshiping, pragmatic gathering of people designed to appeal to a non-worshiper has power to bring that non-worshiper into becoming a worshiper. It's highly unlikely, however, since a non-worshiper attending a non-worshiping church would have no idea what worship was. In reality, the greatest evangelistic power resides in the true worshiping church...a true gathering of God's people genuinely worshipping Him has the greatest collective power in the world to make the gospel believable and effective.

Another component that plays into this is, I guess what you could call, the privatization of spirituality. I was reading an article in the paper today about one of the presidential candidates and the article was not surprising. It said that this particular candidate has faith but his faith is a private matter. That defines the spirituality of our time, a spirituality which is personal, a faith which is private. My faith, says this person as do many today, is my own. I worship God in my own way but my faith is very important to me, but it's very private.

If you, by the way, have a private, personal faith of your own, you'll take it to hell. We do not come together as people who have a personal private faith, we come together as people who have made a public confession of our faith which is not content less, but which is placed directly in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the gospel that is related to Him.

But we live in a world where everybody has a right to their own private religion. We are not a collection of people with a private faith celebrating the privacy of that faith. We are a collection of people with a public faith who have made that confession openly, as you heard in the waters of baptism tonight, and that confession is that Jesus is God the Son who came into the world and died on a cross and rose again to provide salvation for us. We believe the content of the Christian faith. Yes we have a faith that is subjective but it is a faith placed in history that is objective. Our meetings are designed to focus on God, they are designed to honor God. They are designed to exalt Him. We come before God to confess our sin to Him, to renew our covenant to obey Him, to hear Him speak in His Word, to learn more about Him, to love Him more, to serve Him more. And our worship is directed at Him. This is why the church gathers. This is why the true church has always gathered, to worship God.

That's why when we built this building many years ago, we called it a worship center because it is where we come together to worship, not in our private way, but all of us commonly in the same open and public way. We pray prayers together collectively as we are led from the pulpit. We sing hymns collectively together saying the same words, expressing the great profound truths of the Christian faith because we all affirm them together as the saints through the ages have and that's one of the reasons we sing old hymns so that it doesn't appear to anybody that we've invented anything new. We hear the Word of God spoken by one person from this pulpit which is merely an explanation of what God has said in His Word, so that together we might better know what it is that we affirm and believe and obey. This is a worship center where we collectively come to worship the one true God in the one true way which He has ordained in Scripture.

We need to say all of these things because worship is a word today that has been loaded with a lot of personal mystery and intuition and imagined spiritual experience by which people mean whatever they mean. When we talk about worship, we're talking about something very specific, very objective, revelatory, unfolded for us on the pages of Scripture. It is not private, it is not personal in the sense that you define it yourself. It doesn't rise out of your intuition. It doesn't rise out of your experience. It

doesn't rise out of your imagination. It isn't the invention from your own mind of what you want it to be. True worship is simply treating God in the way that God has commanded us to treat Him. That's what it is. We all understand that and we all gather to do that.

There are a number of key words. Perhaps one would be enough in the New Testament, *proskuneo*, to worship, it means to bow down, to prostrate oneself, to kiss the hand. It is honor paid to God and that is why we come together, to give honor to God. You might hear someone say, "Well I went to church today but I didn't get anything out of it." Really, it wasn't for you! That wasn't the point. If you came to get something out of it, you missed the whole point. You should have shown up to give something to God. God is the focus of our worship. It is giving to God honor and reverence and homage and adoration and glory and obedience.

There's a beautiful illustration of this, I think, in the thirtieth chapter of Exodus when God is laying out instruction for worship. At the end of the thirtieth chapter, the Lord says to Moses, "Take for yourself spices, they are named, stacte and onycha and galbanum, spices with pure frankincense; there shall be an equal part of each." This is a recipe. "And with it you shall make incense, a perfume, the work of a perfumer, salted, pure and holy, meaning separated." That is to say, this is a recipe to be used for nothing else. This is unique, separate recipe for a kind of incense perfume. "You shall beat some of it very fine, put part of it before the testimony in the tent of meeting where I shall meet with you, it shall be most holy to you...in this sense...the incense which you shall make, you shall not make in the same proportions for yourselves. It shall be holy to you for the Lord." This is a separate combination of ingredients for a very unique usage to be burned before the Lord.

Verse 38 says, "Whoever shall make any like it to use as perfume in a personal way shall be cut off from the people." What does that mean? Killed. I want you to make an incense, I want you to make a fragrance to set before the very entrance to My place and I want it to be lit and to be a fragrance to Me and to be used for nothing else. This is a symbolic way of saying worship is something that belongs only to Me. As the incense and the fragrance rises out of these elements, so worship rises as a fragrant offering before God, never to be used in any other way. God alone is to be worshiped...symbolized in that most interesting way.

We come to bring before God that which belongs only to Him. We gather to give to Him what is rightfully His. We come together not to receive anything for ourselves, but to give glory and honor to Him. We come to offer Him a fragrant offering that belongs only to Him.

I think it's important for us to understand the distinction between worship and ministry. Ministry is what we do for others. Worship is what we give to God. Ministry is that which comes down to us from the Father through the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit through us to others. Worship is that which goes up from us by the Holy Spirit's power through the Son to the Father. Ministry descends from God to us and through us, worship comes through us and to us and ascends to God. And we have been called to give God worship.

I want you to have a foundation passage for our study and we're going to be looking at a lot of Scriptures, particularly tonight. But a starting point is John 4, so if you will, open your Bible to John 4. The familiar encounter between Jesus and the woman at the well, the Samaritan woman, and we will a little bit later look more broadly at this event. But the words of Jesus are important for us, beginning in verse 21, "Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem shall you worship the Father. You worship that which you do not know. We worship that which we know, for salvation is from the Jews.'"

You have there a clear distinction between useless, ignorant worship and informed worship. Verse 23, "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 in spirit and truth."

Verses 23 and 24 are definitive when it comes to understanding worship. Every word in those two verses is critical. By the time we end this series, each one of those words will, I trust, come to full meaning in our minds. But for now, it is enough to hear Jesus say, "The Father seeks true worshipers, those who worship Him in spirit and in truth." The father seeks true worshipers.

One could conclude that that is the purpose of salvation and one would be right. You were saved to be a worshiper. In Philippians chapter 3, verse 3, Paul defines believers as those who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh. Believers are those who worship in the Spirit of God and give glory to Christ Jesus. We are worshipers. We gather to worship collectively. Do we worship personally? Of course we do. Do we worship when we're alone? Of course we do. We do not worship God, however, in a personal private way, manner. We do not worship a personal private God. We worship the God revealed in Scripture in the manner He has revealed that He is to be worshiped in Scripture and we do worship Him privately and personally in that way as well as publicly and collectively in this way.

So let's ask the question then...what is acceptable worship? What is true worship? What is worship in spirit and truth? What is spiritual worship? And how long has it been since we even asked that question? This is so basic.

I want to ask some questions and answer them, okay? As we work through. Number one, how important is worship? How important is worship? Or perhaps, of what priority is worship? Since churches today seem to have deprioritized it and in many cases virtually dismissed it all together from the public meeting place, is this serious? How important is worship?

Let me answer that by giving you four things to think about, okay? Number one, Scripture calls for worship...Scripture calls for worship as the priority. Scripture calls for worship as the priority and there are so many places to go in Scripture to deal with this that we can barely scratch the surface.

But let me give you some samples from Scripture.

Let's begin at the Law in Exodus 20. "Then God spoke all these words saying, 'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is heaven above, or on the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children on the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me. But showing loving-kindness to thousands to those who love Me and keep My commandments. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.'"

Here the Law begins the summation of all that God demands out of all humanity with a call to worship Him and Him alone.

In Exodus 34:14, this is repeated in a simple statement, "You shall not worship any other God, for the Lord whose name is jealous is a jealous God." This is further defined later on in the second giving of the Law in the book of Deuteronomy where the same commands are repeated again in the fifth chapter of Deuteronomy, "I am the Lord your God...verse 6...who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, you shall have no other gods before Me, shall not make for yourself an idol or any likeness of what is in heaven above, or earth beneath," etc., etc. The Law is repeated.

This is further defined in Deuteronomy 6, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one." And here it's spelled out what worshiping Him means, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I am commanding you today shall be on your heart and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead and you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." When you live your life in every way, standing up, sitting down, lying down, walking in the way, going in the house, out of the house, in the gate, out of the gate, remember this, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, your mind and your strength. This is the first and great commandment."

God wanted His people never to forget that He was to be the focus of their life at all times that they were awake and conscious. And so when God established His people, He gave them a worship place. You remember, He gave them a tabernacle and there He says in Exodus 25:22, "I will meet with you. And from above the mercy seat I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel."

And then God goes on to describe this place where He's going to meet them. Seven chapters, 243 verses describe it. By the way, creation only took 31 verses. This is the place where God is going to

be worshiped.

In the first chapter of Numbers, we're still in the Mosaic Law, there is direction given by God how each part of Israel camps around this place. The tribes were placed on all different sides. The priests were placed in certain configuration. The Levites in certain places. The four sides, each had representative tribes, three in each location facing each side, the priests and the Levites, everything faced the tabernacle. Everything faced the Holy of Holies where God communed with Israel.

According to Numbers 1 and verse 3, soldiers could be twenty years of age. According to Numbers 8 verse 24, Levites could be 25 years of age. But priests who served the temple had to be at least 30 years of age, Numbers 4 and verse 3. Why? Worship was the priority and worship leadership demanded the highest level of maturity...maturity.

The first offering that was introduced in Leviticus chapter 1 verses 1 to 9, the burnt offering was called the ascending offering which the people offered when they ascended to God and of this offering 100 percent of it was burned on the altar. It all went to God, the symbol of worship. In fact, the altar eventually became known as...it was the brazen altar, but it became known as the altar of the burnt offering because the initial offering, the ascending offering by which you launch your worship is all burned up, it is all offered to God. This depicts the essence of true worship. It is devoted to God alone, like the incense. It is all for God and for no one else. This is the divine order. The tabernacle was the place of worship.

Later on when the temple was built, the temple became the place of worship. When you look at Isaiah chapter 6, you see a picture of God high and lifted up, majestic in His heavenly temple in the vision that was given to Isaiah and He is surrounded by basically worshiping beings of His own creation called angels. Angels are worshiping creatures. They have four wings which express worship...covering their faces so that they cannot see the full blaze of His presence, He's too glorious; covering their feet for the ground on which they stand is holy; four wings for worship, two to fly in service. Worship is the priority.

Psalm 95 verses 6 and 7, "O come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker, for He is our God." That expresses the attitude of true worship.

In the New Testament, a couple of passages to draw to your attention just to help in defining the biblical command to worship as a priority. Romans chapter 12, "I urge you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God which is your spiritual service of worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." We are called to acceptable worship, to a spiritual service which is acceptable to God. And in order to do that, we have to have a kind of worship, please note, that is not conformed to this world. What we're watching happen in the evangelical church today is worship disappearing out of the so-

called church and being replaced by things that are completely conformed to this world. We are to worship God in a way that is not all conformed to this world, but is reflective of minds that have been transformed by being renewed by the Spirit of God through the Word of God to be consumed with the will of the Lord and not the things that appeal to the world.

In 1 Peter chapter 2 and verse 5, Peter says that, "We are living stones built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." I just want you to understand that your life is a call to worship. Your salvation made you into a worshiper. You worship in the power of the Spirit of God, you give glory in that worship to Jesus Christ, Philippians 3:3. You have been redeemed and made into a true worshiper, John 4:23 and 24, because the Father seeks true worshipers who worship Him in spirit and in truth. You are to present your body, your whole being as an act of spiritual sacrifice, acceptable to God in worship. You are a royal priesthood, a holy priesthood, offering up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God.

This is what it means to be a Christian. Worship is the priority. Worship is first, before ministry there is always worship. It was Isaiah in chapter 6 who was called to worship by the antiphonal angels, "Holy, holy, holy...holy, holy, holy," they said. And once he saw the holiness of God, he was destroyed and devastated and crushed and he cried out that he should be cursed along with Israel because he had a dirty mouth and he lived among a dirty-mouthed people. And the Lord sent an angel with a coal from off the altar and put it on his mouth because penitence and cleansing is painful, that's the imagery there. And he was cleansed and his sin was cleansed. And he was purged. And then God said, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" He said, "Here am I, send me." And the Lord sent him. Service always follows worship. It's the vision of God that comes first, as it did for Isaiah.

So worship is essential because it is commanded in Scripture. It is THE priority. Before we are anything else, we are worshipers of the true God, the God who is not only the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob but who is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, it would be well, I think, for us to say of ourselves, we are not only believers in Jesus Christ, we are not only Christians, but we are worshipers of God through the power of the Spirit who give all the glory to Christ. We are worshipers. Our worship is not personal and private, intuitive, mystical kind of spirituality, our worship is of the true God revealed in Scripture.

Now there's a second...there's a second thing to consider. When we think about what is THE priority and it is worship, we could also ask how influential is our worship, or how vast are the implications of our worship. And the answer to that is, how we worship influences everything, absolutely everything. It touches all of life...absolutely all of life. This is...this is such a vast subject, I can't cover all of it. But how you worship is the most defining thing about your life. Superficial worship, shallow worship, wrong worship cripples, debilitates, robs God of what is rightfully His, limits your usefulness, denigrates your whole Christian experience. We need to worship in the right way, to give God what He is due and to put ourselves in a position of being most useful to God.

Time and eternity are determined by the nature of a person's worship. Acceptable worship touches all of life, so does unacceptable worship. Let's talk about that, first of all. What are the ways we don't want to worship? What is unacceptable worship? Worship that has a wrong influence, a wrong affect, a wrong result?

There are four kinds. And we need to think these through. Four kinds of worship that are not acceptable worship to God. Number one, worship of false gods. We've already seen that in the commandments of Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. The worship of false gods...of any kind. Romans 1 talks about how unacceptable this is. Romans 1 and verse 20, "Since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes, His eternal power, divine nature have been clearly seen being understood through what has been made so that men are without excuse. They did not...even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God. They didn't give Him thanks. They became futile in their speculations, their foolish heart was darkened, professing to be wise they became fools. They exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man, birds, four-footed animals, crawling creatures. This is unacceptable worship." Unacceptable worship, false gods. That's what the world does.

By the way, Romans 1 is just a cycle that goes on all the time. Romans 1 is describing all of human history, men reject the true God and worship false gods. That's the way it always is, it's the way it always goes. You can look into the Old Testament and find all kinds of illustrations of this. There are a number of them that I will draw to your attention because it's so important to know biblical teaching on this and dig a little bit into the Old Testament. Job 31 verse 24, "If I put my confidence in gold, and call fine gold my trust, if I gloated because my wealth was great, and because my hand had secured so much, if I had looked at the sun when it shone, or the moon going in splendor and my heart became secretly enticed, and my hand threw a kiss from my mouth at the sun or the moon, that too would have been an iniquity calling for judgment for I would have denied God above. If I worship gold, or if I worship an idol made of gold, or if I worship the moon or the sun as the pagans have, I have denied the true God."

Back in Deuteronomy chapter 4 we have it in another form. Verse 14, "The Lord commanded me at that time to teach your statutes and judgments that you might perform them in the land where you're going over to possess it. So watch yourselves carefully, since you didn't see any form on the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire, lest you act corruptly and make a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the sky, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water below the earth, beware lest you lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the hosts of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven."

Don't worship animals. Don't worship stars again, celestial creation. There are biblical warnings about any supposed deity that you worship in something created is really worshipping demons.

When you go to the Old Testament you can hear Isaiah denounce this, you can hear Ezekiel denounce it, you can hear Jeremiah denounce it, Daniel denounce it. It is denounced in the New Testament, a couple of times in the book of Acts, in the book of Revelation, the worship of any false god. Perhaps the most memorable of all these passages is the forty-fourth chapter of Isaiah and I think it's very worthy to be read to you because it shows the folly of this kind of worship. Verse 12, "The man...Isaiah 44...shapes iron into a cutting tool, does his work over the coals, fashions it with hammers, working it with his strong arm, gets hungry, his strength fails, drinks no water, becomes weary, working really hard with a cutting tool over the blacksmith fire. Another man takes wood, shapes it, measures it, outlines it with red chalk, works it with planes, outlines it with a compass, make sit like the form a man, like the beauty of man so that it may sit in a house. He cuts cedars for himself, takes a cypress or an oak, raises it for himself among the trees of the forest, plants a fir. The rain makes it grow. And then it becomes something for a man to burn, so he takes one of them and warms himself. He also makes a fire to bake bread. He also makes a god and worships it. Makes a graven image and falls down before it."

How ridiculous is that? To make a god with your own hands? Take a tree, use some of it to make bread, some of it to keep warm and some of it to make a god. God does not look kindly on the worship of a false god. There is a movement today, a very popular movement that says that God will accept the worship of a false god if that's all you knew. That somehow God will overlook the fact that you're worshipping a false god and based on your sort of noble effort, He will take you into His heaven. Not true. It is not acceptable to worship a false god.

Secondly, another form of unacceptable worship, it is unacceptable to worship the true God in a wrong form. It is unacceptable to worship the true God in a wrong form. In Exodus 20 the people of Israel were told to have no graven image, that's chapter 20. It didn't take them long, chapter 32, they already had a graven image. They already had a graven image. And, in fact, how bizarre is this, they made a golden...what?...calf, verse 8, Exodus 32, the Lord speaks to Moses about this, says, "The people have corrupted themselves, they have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, 'This is your God, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.'" That's the bizarre part, they were worshipping the true God of Israel who brought them out of Egypt in the form of a golden calf. It is unacceptable to worship a false god. It is equally unacceptable to worship the true God in a wrong form.

And by the way, thousands were slain that day...thousands were slain that day. I'm concerned that in the day in which we live that in this so-called evangelical world, there are a lot of people who say they're worshipping God but they're worshipping Him in a wrong form, in a form of their own making.

They have designed their own God to their own liking. They have found a God they're comfortable with, not the God of the Bible, but the God of their own intuition.

And they say, "Yes, I believe in God. Yes, I worship God," but the God they worship, listen, is accessed through self, this God is accessed through their intuition. This is the God who they like. This is the therapeutic God who speaks to them in their heart of hearts, who speaks to them in this or that event in life. This is not the God of the Bible. This is not the God who is over them. This is not the God who is holy. This is not the God who is the judge. This is not the God who is all glorious in beauty and power and majesty. This is not the awesome God.

To say it another way, as David Welles puts it, this is the inside God and not the outside God. The inside God is the God that people make that they're comfortable with. This is the manufacturing of their own corrupt spiritual intuition. This is not the outside God of divine revelation. God is angry when you worship a false God, or when you worship one you say is the true God in a form of your own making. That is unacceptable.

Thirdly, we could say another form of unacceptable worship is the worship of the true God in a self-styled way. You find this illustrated, for example, in Leviticus chapter 10. Again, it didn't take very long after these commandments were given by God, the main one being to worship Him in a true way, to have people violate that. In Leviticus 10 is the story of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, who took their respective fire pans and offered strange fire before the Lord, intruding in the priestly office in a way that was a violation of God's ordered plan and revelation. The fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them and they died before the Lord. Not only are you to worship the true God in the true form as a spirit and not an idol, but in the true way which He has ordained.

And, fourthly, another unacceptable way to worship God is to worship the true God with a wrong attitude...to worship the true God with a wrong attitude. You might actually be worshiping the true God, you might actually be worshiping the true God as spirit, not in a form made by man, you might be worshiping the true God as spirit in ways that the Scripture says you are to worship, but you might be doing it with the wrong attitude. This is hypocritical, formal legalism, ritualism.

Of all the prophets that deal with this in the Old Testament, and there are many, Malachi perhaps is as concise as any. Malachi 1 verse 6, "A son honors his father, a servant his master. Then if I am a Father, says God, where's My honor? If I'm a master, where's My respect, says the Lord of host to you? O priests who despise My name. But you say, 'How have we despised Thy name?' You're presenting defiled food upon My altar. Instead of bringing the best, you bring what's rotten and can't be eaten. You say, 'How have we defiled You in that you say the table of the Lord is to be despised? You defile Me when you think so little of the offering brought to Me that you bring what is corrupt. Or when you...verse 8...present the blind for sacrifice. Is not the animal supposed to be perfect? And when you present the lame and the sick, is it not evil? Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Would he receive you kindly, says the Lord of hosts? But now you will 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? O that there were one among you who would shut the gates that you might not uselessly kindle fire on My altar. You are phony, your religion is phony, your offerings are phony, your fires, sacrificial fires are useless. I am not pleased with you, nor will I accept an offering from you 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."

Verse 13, "You say, 'My how tiresome it is,' and you disdainfully sniff at it, says the Lord of hosts." In other words, you're weary with all these offerings. "Just performing and you bring what was taken by robbery, what is lame and sick. Should I receive that from your hand? But cursed be the swindler who has a male in his flock and vows it but sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord, for I am a great king...a great king, says the Lord of hosts."

Look at chapter 3. He says in verse 8, "Will a man rob God? You're robbing Me? 'How have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings, you're cursed with a curse, you're robbing Me, the whole nation of you. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse so there may be food in My house. Test Me now in this, says the Lord of hosts." Verse 13, "Your words have been arrogant against Me, says the Lord. Yet you say, How have we spoken against You? You said it is vain to serve God and what prophet is it that we have kept His charge and that we have walked in mourning before the Lord? So now we call the arrogant blessed. Not only are the doers of wickedness built up but they also test God and escape."

Everything was hypocritical, phony, perfunctory, ritualistic, legalistic, false worship. Amos chapter 5, "Stop your songs," he says, "your hearts aren't right, your music is an abomination to Me."

So when we talk about worship that is unacceptable, it is the worship of a false god, the worship of the true God in a wrong form, or the worship of the true God in a correct form as spirit but in a self-styled way as if you could invent your own ways to worship. Or the worship of the true God in a right form through the right ways but with a wrong heart. All of this is unacceptable worship and it touches every part of life. How impactful is this? It's devastating. People who did this died. People who did this were punished and judged by God. It gives rise to guilt and judgment and condemnation. God is to be worshiped as the true God, in the true form as that eternal spirit, in the true way that Scripture calls us to worship, and with a true heart attitude. Then it becomes acceptable worship.

What is acceptable worship? And we'll close with this. Look at Psalm 24, verse 3, "Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Who can come up to worship? Who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart." You're clean on the inside, you're clean on the outside. "He who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood, who has not sworn deceitfully. He shall receive a blessing

from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation. This is the generation of those who seek Him who seek Thy face, even Jacob.”

Acceptable worship is the most defining thing in your life. The goal of salvation is to produce worshipers. God wants to be worshiped acceptably. We are first and foremost beyond anything else worshipers of the living and true God. You hear all these people today who say, “Well yes, I believe in God and I believe in Jesus, but I don’t go to church. I have a very personal faith.” If you don’t hunger and thirst for the collective expression of worship, it’s likely that you’re probably not a Christian, or if you are one, you are very, very deep into disobedience. We are those who worship in the spirit of God and give glory to Jesus Christ. This is the highlight of our lives. Personal worship, yes in the true way, worship from the heart at all times, but also a hunger for the collective expression of worship and praise that comes when the people of God gather. We don’t forsake the assembling of ourselves together. We gather together as those who are true worshipers. In fact, for us it’s the highlight. We can’t wait to come together with the people of God to offer worship to our Redeemer.

That worship takes a lot of forms. True worship touches every area of our life. Romans 14:18 says, “How you worship affects how you treat fellow Christians.” That’s a matter of acceptable worship. Romans 15:16 tells us that winning the lost is a form of worship. Ephesians 5:10 says walking in the light is acceptable worship. Philippians 1:11, Philippians 4:18 says personal holiness is acceptable worship. First Timothy 2:3, prayer for others is acceptable worship. First Timothy 5:4, gratitude is acceptable worship. First Peter 2:20, righteous suffering is acceptable worship. Everything in our lives done by the power of the Spirit to the glory of God becomes acceptable worship. Hebrews 13:15 and 16 sort of wraps it up, “Through Him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God that is the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name and do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifice God is pleased with praise, with giving thanks, with all manner of doing what is good and sharing with others.” All of that constitutes worship...worship.

This is the most defining element in our life, to please God by doing what pleases Him as an act of worship. And it culminates in collective corporate praise. Through Him, let us continually offer up sacrifice of praise to God.

Well, we’ve covered a couple of the four points that I wanted to give you by way of introduction. And it know it’s basic, but we’re going to take up the remaining two and then move forward next time. Father, we thank You for some time tonight to think about worship, to come to grips with how essential it really is, to ask ourselves the question, “Do I really understand what worship is and am I really a true worshiper? Am I worshiping in spirit and in truth?” To consider the priority of worship and to consider what acceptable worship is, is so foundation, so defining. Before we are anything else, we are worshipers. The greatest command is a command to worship, to love You with all our heart, soul, mind, strength...that’s the essence of worship. Anything less than that is a failure to give You the worship You deserve. May we worship You and You alone, may we worship You as You truly are, the God who You really are, may we worship You in the ways that You have told us to

worship You, may we worship You at all times in all situations, always giving You glory for You are worthy beyond our comprehension. Thank You for creating in us the life that is eternal and divine that enables us to worship You. We bless Your name. Increase our worship, we pray, in the name of Christ. Amen.

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