

# Unacceptable Worship, Part 1

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**John 4:23–24 (NKJV) “*But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. 24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*”**

Worship is at the heart of Scripture. The Bible is our worship manual. It tells us Who the true and living God is, what He is like, and how He wants to be worshiped. Worship is the great controversy of redemption. In a nutshell, it might be said that redemption is about the restoration of true worship and true worshipers.

There are only two kinds of worship, acceptable worship and unacceptable worship. In Genesis chapter 4 we see this clearly illustrated. Cain and his younger brother Abel each brought an offering of worship to the Lord. Both came with the intent to worship God. However, they experienced different results. God accepted Abel’s worship but rejected Cain’s worship. God’s acceptance or rejection of the act of worship was directly related to God’s acceptance or rejection of the worshiper: “*If you do well, will you not be accepted?*” (Genesis 4:7) God does not give us the liberty to offer worship on our terms. He does not give us the liberty to be innovative. He alone determines how He wants to be worshiped. It is up to the worshiper to discover and approach God on His terms. Acceptable worship is not legitimized by the worshiper but by God who is worshiped. The important question then is: “Is our worship acceptable or unacceptable in the sight of God?”

There are several kinds of unacceptable worship addressed in Scripture. The first kind of unacceptable worship is the worship of *false gods*. The Bible teaches that there is only one true and living God—the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Other religions are idolatrous in nature. Idolatry exchanges the worship of God for something else (Romans 1:18-23). Idolatry develops its own religious system of false altars, false sacrifices, false priests, false prophets, false signs and wonders, false teaching, false experiences, and false promises. Exodus 20:3-6 makes it clear that God considers those who practice idolatry as God-haters and will punish succeeding generations for their rebellion against Him by introducing, practicing, and promoting idolatry.

A second kind of unacceptable worship is the worship of the true God in the *wrong way*. We can worship God in the wrong way by introducing icons and images into our worship: Deuteronomy 4:12 (NKJV) “*And the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of the words, but saw no form; you only heard a voice.*” One illustration from the Scripture is when Aaron fashioned the golden calf in Exodus 32:4–6 and presented it as the LORD that brought them out of Egypt. God severely judged this unacceptable style of worship.

A third kind of unacceptable worship is worshiping God with *pagan elements or methods*. I believe this has become one of the greatest sources of worship defilement in modern Christianity. Deuteronomy 12:29–32 (NKJV) says, “*When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.’ You shall not worship the LORD your God in that*

way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. 'Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.' " The prophet Isaiah lamented to the LORD: "For You have forsaken Your people, the house of Jacob, because they are filled with eastern ways; they are soothsayers like the Philistines, and they are pleased with the children of foreigners" (Isaiah 2:6 NKJV) Hear the exhortation of the apostle Paul: "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.' Therefore 'Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.' 'I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters,' says the LORD Almighty." (2 Corinthians 6:14-18 NKJV) Scripture is clear: idolatrous mixture is unacceptable worship.

A fourth kind of unacceptable worship is worshiping God with *strange (profane) fire*. We find this in Leviticus 10:1–3: "Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. And Moses said to Aaron, 'This is what the LORD spoke, saying: "By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified."' So Aaron held his peace." Many Christians today are talking about "fire" without considering the origin of that fire. Remember: Not everything buried is treasure and not everything that burns is fire from God. Strange fire is worship that does not originate with God. It is counterfeit fire producing false anointing, false signs, false wonders, false miracles, false manifestations, false prophecy, and a host of other things.

A fifth kind of unacceptable worship is worshiping God with *man-made traditions*. This was a problem in Jesus' day: "He answered and said to them, 'Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, "Honor your father and your mother"; and, "He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death." But you say, "Whoever says to his father or mother, 'Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God'— then he need not honor his father or mother." Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 8 "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"" (Matthew 15:3-9 NKJV) We must be careful to avoid substituting obedience to God's commands with our own man-made preferences, rituals, or traditions. In Matthew chapter 23 Jesus pronounced eight stinging "Woes" against this false man-made religious structure.

(Continued next month)

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