

Unacceptable Worship, Part 2

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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.”*

A sixth kind of false worship is presumptive worship—imposing our own ideas upon the worship of God. Presumptive worship occurs when we ignore or twist God’s word. This is one of Satan’s primary means to bring God’s people into error.

In Matthew 4:5-7, Satan used presumption as a tactic of temptation. Satan took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and said to Him: *“If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’ and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.’”* Satan twisted the Scripture to tempt Jesus to disobey God’s command. Jesus overcame Satan’s ploy by declaring God’s command: *“You shall not tempt the LORD your God.”* When God gives us a command, we are never to twist Scripture to justify disobedience to His command.

One of the clearest examples of presumptive worship is found in 2 Samuel 6:6–9 (NKJV): *“And when they came to Nachon’s threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled.”⁷ Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God.”⁸ And David became angry because of the LORD’s outbreak against Uzzah; and he called the name of the place Perez Uzzah to this day.”⁹ David was afraid of the LORD that day; and he said, ‘How can the ark of the LORD come to me?’”* David presumed to bring the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem on an ox-cart rather than on the shoulders of the priest as God commanded. David’s failure to consider divine protocol cost Uzzah his life and postponed the effort to bring the ark to Jerusalem.

Another tragic example of presumptive worship is found in 1 Samuel 13:1-15. In his pride and impatience, King Saul presumed to offer a sacrifice for the nation outside. God had prescribed that only priests and sometimes prophets could offer such sacrifices. His presumption cost him his kingdom.

Unfortunately, King Saul did not learn his lesson. In 1 Samuel 15:1-29 God gave him clear instructions to destroy Amalek and all that they possessed. Instead King Saul presumed to bring back the best of the flocks along with the king of Amalek as prisoner. When confronted by the prophet Samuel, King Saul tried to spiritualize his disobedience to God’s command. He used worship as his excuse—to bring back an offering to God. Samuel rebuked King Saul: *“Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.”²³ For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king.”* (1 Samuel 15:22-23 NKJV) Obedience is the essence of acceptable worship.

As previously stated, presumptive worship is often the result of twisting Scripture—taking Scripture out of context with the motive of making it say what it does not say or to support what it does not support. Almost anything can be justified by ignoring, twisting, and piecing Scriptures together. However, this in no way changes its true meaning or our accountability to obey it. Unfortunately, if we do not properly read and study the Bible to find out its true meaning, then we will be easily led astray in the area of worship. In 2 Peter 3:14-16, the apostle Peter warned that those who twist Scripture do so to their own destruction. Although there can be several

applications of any passage, there is only one true interpretation intended by God. God is not obliged to recognize or uphold our alterations of His Word.

We often become presumptive in worship because we rely upon our own ability to know or discern what is of God and what is not. Rather than rely upon the absolute authority of Scripture, we lay aside the Scripture and trust in our own understanding, feelings, opinions, and experiences. In essence, we do what is right in our own eyes. When our pride convinces us that we are beyond deception, our fate is sealed. We become unreceptive to the idea that what we think, feel, experience, or promote as worship may be unacceptable to God. Human reasoning, emotions, and experiences are not trustworthy guides. When relied upon, they provide the perfect breeding ground for every aberrant and destructive form of false worship.

We can also become presumptive in worship when we imagine that God is like us. However, God is not like us: *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD.*⁹ *“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”* (Isaiah 55:8-9 NKJV) We must be very careful not to impose our own ideas of what is acceptable into the worship of God. God says He will rebuke those who do: *“But to the wicked God says: ‘What right have you to declare My statutes, or take My covenant in your mouth,¹⁷ seeing you hate instruction and cast My words behind you?¹⁸ When you saw a thief, you consented with him, and have been a partaker with adulterers.¹⁹ You give your mouth to evil, and your tongue frames deceit.²⁰ You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother’s son.²¹ These things you have done, and I kept silent; you thought that I was altogether like you; but I will rebuke you, and set them in order before your eyes.”* (Psalm 50:16-21 NKJV)

A seventh kind of false worship is the worship of the true God in the right way but with the wrong motive and attitude. If we follow correct external methods of worship but have the wrong attitude and motive, then our worship will be unacceptable to God no matter how acceptable it may seem on the outside.

The Bible has much to say about the attitude and motive of the heart in worship. The following are some of the unacceptable conditions of the heart that God rejects: an unconsecrated heart (Leviticus 21:10-12; Romans 12:1-2); a heart that lacks honor and reverential fear for God (Leviticus 10:3; Malachi 1:6-14; 1 Corinthians 11:20-22); a heart that is unholy (Isaiah 1:10-17); a heart void of faith (Genesis 4:3-7; Hebrews 11:4); an unforgiving heart that refuses to be reconciled with others (Matthew 5:23–24); a proud and self-righteous heart (Colossians 2:11–23); a heart that is insincere (Matthew 15:8); and a heart that refuses to change (Ezekiel 33:30-32; 46:9; 2 Corinthians 3:18). Clearly, everything publicly called “worship” by men is not acceptable to God. While men look upon and approve the outward appearance, God looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7).

The entire Bible might be summarized in terms of the restoration of true worship. From the moment Lucifer rebelled in heaven over his desire to be worshiped like God, the war over worship continues. Earth is the battlefield. Satan is doing everything he can to steal or distort the worship of God in the earth. Worship does not originate on earth but around God’s throne. Worship does not originate with human beings. It is not ours to invent or innovate. Worship is all about God. Worship belongs to God. He alone determines what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. The Bible is God’s final authority on worship. If we want our worship to be acceptable to the Lord, then we must seek to learn and follow His Word.

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