

## "Problems in Worship"

How God sees our worship and how we see our worship may differ greatly. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study, In Search of the Lord's Way. God doesn't accept all that people call worship. He asks that we honor Him by how we worship. Let's study God's Word together.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way. We're here to search God's Word for the Lord's Way to worship. The Bible always teaches us the heart and the mind of God. It teaches how to please Him. And that's why we go to God's Word for the truth. Thanks for spending this time with us. We love to hear that's you're watching or listening. And thanks for letting us into your home each week.

In worship we express our thanks, our love, and our praise for God. Our Father has richly blessed us; and how could we not want to worship Him? What we offer to God should honor and glorify Him. God wants worshippers who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. And sometimes people offer God worship that actually offends, worship that He will not accept. Some people are surprised that God would reject their worship. They think God will be pleased no matter what we offer, but the Bible tells of several instances where God rejected the worship of His people.

If we should learn that our worship is not acceptable to God, what should we do? Should we get angry? Should we stop worshiping the God of Heaven and start worshiping another god, or a god of our own making? Should we close our ears to the teaching of the Scripture and convince ourselves that it doesn't matter? Should we go and find someone who will agree with us? Who will tell us what we want to hear?

Let's stop a moment. Wouldn't it be better for us to listen to God? Wouldn't it be wise to take God's instructions in the Bible to heart and humble ourselves? If we're not pleasing to the Lord, we should humbly change our ways. Let's lovingly obey so that we may honor the Lord. Today we're going to examine the Scriptures. We're going to see how others have worshiped God in unacceptable ways and learn how we can please God in our worship.

Now we offer the information on this program free. And if you'd like a printed copy, this little book on worship, or a CD of our study, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to [searchtv@searchtv.org](mailto:searchtv@searchtv.org). Or, if you like, you call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. Now we also stream this program on our website at [www.searchtv.org](http://www.searchtv.org).

Larry Owsley will lead the Edmond church in song, and then we'll read from Genesis 4 verses 1 to 5.

Our reading this morning comes from the first book in the Bible Genesis chapter 4 verses 1 through 5. Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, "I have gotten a manchild with *the help of* the LORD." Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell.

That's the first story about worship that we have in scripture. Let's pray together. Father, help us to learn from Your Word the things that we need to know so that we may do Your will and may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen.

Genesis 4 presents the very first example of worship in the Bible. The two brothers, Cain and Abel, both came before the Lord with their different gifts. We don't know exactly what God required of them in their sacrifices. The Bible says, "So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering

to the LORD of the fruit of the ground.” We know that Cain tilled the ground and brought some of its produce. We do not know if his offering contained his best fruit or his first fruit. The text suggests that he was just discharging a duty.

“Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions.” Abel brought the first and the best of his flock. In Hebrews 11 and verse 4 says, “By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.” Now Abel apparently showed a faith in God that Cain did not show. Abel went out of his way to please God. And as a result, God regarded Abel as righteous, because he offered an acceptable sacrifice.

Now the next verse says, “And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard.” Did you catch that? God did not have regard *for Cain* or *for his offering*. There was something lacking in Cain’s faith. We learn from 1 John 3 and verse 12 that Cain’s deeds were evil, referring to his life, his offering, and his attitude. God made a distinction between an offering from a righteous and faithful man who wanted to please and an offering that was merely a discharge of duty.

When God did not accept Cain’s sacrifice, then you remember, that Cain got angry and eventually killed his brother Abel over it. When people learn they have failed to live up to God’s expectations, rather than getting upset they should repent and change their ways. Now no one likes to hear they have failed, but Cain’s life would have been so much better if he had changed his ways.

In Exodus chapter 32, the Bible tells of the rebellious Israelites who gave up on the Lord and Moses and they demanded idols. You remember that Aaron took their gold rings and made an idol in the form of a golden calf. They said the golden calf that they fashioned was the god who brought them out of Egypt. Well the next day they called a feast to the Lord. They sacrificed offerings, they sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play. They behaved like the idolatrous nations surrounding them with drunken dancing that was filled with sensuality. Idolatrous worship often ended up in sexually immoral behavior. Well they rose up to play, and they thought playing was worship.

Ancient idolaters thought that their drinking and immoral dance was worship, and the Israelites said the calf that they made was the Lord. But they were wrong on both accounts, and the Lord grew angry at them. My friend you cannot be on the Lord’s side and worship the way they did. You cannot serve a holy God with impure behavior.

Now what they thought was worship was really a great sin. In 1 Corinthians 10 verses 6 to 7, the Bible says, “Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; and as it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.’” We must learn that only acceptable worship to the true and living God is right.

In Isaiah the prophet’s day, in his day, the people thought they could worship God acceptably while they willfully lived wicked lives. And God wearied of their sacrifices and their feasts because of their iniquity. The Lord said in Isaiah 1, 15 to 17, “When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; because your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, and learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause.”

Because they chose to live ungodly lives, God would not hear their prayers. Now I realize none of us can live a perfectly sinless life. You can’t and I can’t. God desires that when we do sin, however, that

we repent of our sins and humbly ask for forgiveness. David, after his sin, wrote in Psalm 51 and verse 17, that “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.” But if we approach God unbroken and impenitent, how can we imagine that God will accept us?

As we turn to the New Testament, we find other problems with worship. The Lord Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount devotes eighteen verses to the problem of displaying righteousness to be seen by others. Jesus said in Matthew 6 and verse 1, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.” He described this behavior as hypocrisy. Now hypocrisy takes place when a person pretends to be something that he doesn’t intend to be. People were pretending to worship, but in God’s eyes they were only showing off their righteousness.

The Lord applies this principle to three acts of devotion: giving alms, praying, and fasting. And the hypocrites would blow a trumpet before the people to call attention to their gifts. They weren’t giving to God; they were showing off. The Lord teaches us in Matthew 6 verses 3 and 4, “Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

The people also proved themselves hypocrites in their prayers. Hypocrites “love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, you go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Matthew 6 verses 5 and 6).

Third, when the hypocrites fasted they put on gloomy faces and neglected their appearance, “so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, (Jesus said) that they have their reward in full. “But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you.” (Matthew 6 verses 16 to 18).

Now in Jesus’ time, the Pharisees and others were tempted by the flesh to make a show out of their worship. I fear the same kind of thing is happening today. When people become enamored with Christian music stars, they have taken their eyes off of God. Even some preachers believe their calling is to promote a health and wealth gospel. They promise blessings that have nothing to do with discipleship to Christ and everything to do with the crass materialism of our day. Other preachers believe their calling is to be stand-up comedians, using the pulpit for their stage. Well this is not the Lord’s way.

Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 4 verses 1 to 2, “I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.” It is the Word, the gospel that saves (Romans 1:16). It is the Word of Christ that brings faith (Romans 10 and verse 17). It is the Word that nourishes our souls (1 Peter 2 and verse 2). We need the Bible to grow strong and spiritually healthy.

Now, Paul warned the elders of the church at Ephesus that savage wolves would come in among them, not sparing the flock. They’ll speak twisted and perverse ideas that will draw disciples away from the Lord’s way. This false teaching will split the church. Well what did Paul recommend? The Bible says in Acts 20 verse 32, “And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to

build *you* up and to give *you* the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” To follow Christ, we must have the Word. Nothing else will do.

So Paul warns Timothy in 2 Timothy 4 verses 3 to 5, “That the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; (that is healthy teaching) but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they’ll accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires, and they’ll turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, (Timothy) be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

Some churches today have forgotten the importance of the Word and have replaced preaching with comic routines, or dramatic skits, or self-improvement rallies. We ask, “Where is the Lord in all of this?” Jesus didn’t waste His time showing off or trying to exploit people with outlandish claims. The Lord said in Luke 19 and verse 10, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” He preached a message of repentance, of love, and of salvation. Christianity is more than another course in the power of positive thinking.

Some churches today separate their worship services into traditional and contemporary in order to please everyone. Well, is pleasing people more important than the unity of the congregation? Perhaps they’ve bought into a consumer mentality where what people want overrides what God wills. Is it God’s will that people’s worship desires are more important than what God requires? Is pleasing people more important than pleasing God?

The Lord Jesus prayed to the Father in John 17 verses 20 to 21 “I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.” God wants His people to be one. Not separated in this group and that. And if we cannot assemble with each other because we have different tastes in worship, well we’ve become a house divided against itself.

In some churches women have taken a role of leadership in worship that God does not permit. Several denominations now have women pastors and preachers. 1 Timothy 2 and verse 8 says, “Therefore I want the men (that is males of full age and stature) in every place (that is in the church) to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.” Now wherever the church meets, God expects men to take the lead.

God says in 1 Timothy 2 verses 11 to 14, that “A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, *and* then Eve. And *it was* not Adam *who* was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.”

Now, this is the Lord’s way, for men to lead; cultural change doesn’t change God’s will. The Lord desires men to lead the church. Now to support this, Paul appeals to creation and to the fall of Adam and Eve. Paul uses events from the beginning to show this is a fundamental principle for all time and all cultures. It is God’s will that men lead in the worship of the church. Friends let’s commit ourselves to the will of God. Let’s pray together. Oh Father we’re thankful that You and Your Word has taught us the things that You would like for us to do. Father help us to be faithful, to be loving and to submit to Your will. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen.

Showing God love and respect in worship requires listening to God to find out what He desires and requires. Cain lived his life on his own terms without faith or thought about God, and God had no regard for Cain or for His sacrifice. Now if we live on our terms and lose sight of God’s will, what makes us think that God will accept our worship? God sees and knows all about us.

God expects our hearts to be right before Him if we're to worship Him. As we've said, God did not accept the worship of Israel in Isaiah's time because they were living wicked lives. You can't live like the devil six days a week and expect the Lord to accept you when you worship on the first day of the week. God expects His people to forsake their sins. You cannot be right with God until you're washed in the blood of Jesus Christ.

My friend, are you right with God? Perhaps today you need to establish a relationship with the Lord, because you want to worship and thank Him. To become His child you must place your faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, you must repent of your sins and turn to the Lord, you must confess your faith before others, and you must be baptized in water for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2 and 38 and 22:16). Now when you're baptized into Christ, you're baptized into His death according to Romans 6 and verse 3. Now baptism connects you with the blood of Christ and the freedom from sin. Romans 6 and verse 4 tells us that baptism raises us up with Christ so that we may walk in newness of life. Today is the best day to get right with God. We ask that you worship with one of the churches of Christ served by this station and let them know that you want to get right with God. You'll be glad you did.

We hope you've been challenged by today's study of God's Word. If you want a free printed copy of our study on worship or a CD of this message, or the particular one "Problems in Worship" mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send us a e-mail to [searchtv@searchtv.org](mailto:searchtv@searchtv.org).

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We do ask that you please attend worship at one of the churches of Christ in the area that's served by this station or network. They love guests, and you'll be glad that you visited and worshipped with them. Well we'll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about this program. As always we say to you, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.