

A Call To Acceptable Worship

Hebrews 12:28-29

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“let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.”

Have you ever wondered, what is so distinctive about us coming together as a church?
What is God looking for in you as we assemble together corporately?

Answer: God is looking for worshippers.

Not attenders. Not guests. Not visitors. Not members but worshippers.

Yes, we love attenders, guests and visitors. We value church membership but the reason we have a service is for the worship of God.

“But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him”

John 4:23-24

No sinner seeks to worship God in his or her fallen condition. So, the Father sends His Son Jesus Christ so that sinners may become worshippers.

If last week’s message was about Jesus Christ saving sinners, today’s message is about worship.

God’s plan in saving us was to turn self-loving wrath-deserving hell-bound sinners into forgiven, joyful, neighbor-loving heaven-bound worshippers of God.

Worship of God is our priority. This is why we gather.

We worship because God requires worship!

“And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul” Deuteronomy 10:12

This is the greatest commandment. In the Gospel of Mark, A man came to Jesus asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” And Jesus tells this man to

love God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength. Jesus quotes from the Deuteronomy passage that Moses instructed the people of Israel.

And you worship God because you have come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. You worship not of out of obligation or compulsion or being imposed upon but you worship freely. The Puritan Jeremiah Borroughs writing on the subject of worship in his book *Gospel Worship* says, “We must come freely to worship God, but we must not worship God according to our own wills”. Jesus said in Mathew 15:9 “*in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*”. Commenting on this verse, Borroughs says this: “It is a vain thing to worship when there is nothing but a commandment of men for this worship. If you would worship God, you must have a commandment of God to worship.. And in the worship of God there must be nothing but what God commands”.

Webster dictionary defines worship this way: “extravagant respect or admiration for or devotion to an object of esteem”.

And the object of our worship is God alone.

I wonder how many things compete with your worship of God?

What occupies your mind, heart and soul first thing in the morning? What governs your choices and decisions during the day?

Satan wanted to compete with God. He wanted the worship that belonged to God alone. We see in Matthew chapter four how the devil tempts our Lord with such a brazen offer. “*the devil took him (Jesus) to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”* Matthew 4:8-9

That’s it. Give into the Satan’s agenda. And you can receive the things of this world. Worship is not just a physical bending of the knee. It’s not giving in to what fallen humanity desperately craves for – the craving for the things of this world and their glory. What did Jesus tell the devil?

¹⁰ *Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’”*

There is a battle for your affections, your heart and your soul every day.

- King David is old and gives fatherly counsel to his son Solomon. Here is what David says, “*And you, Solomon my son, know the God of your father and serve him with a whole heart and with a willing mind*” 1 Chronicles 28:9

The word *serve* is worship. How is Solomon to worship or server God? Singular devotion. Undivided worship.

Going back to our text, the author of Hebrews tells us to offer, to give to God acceptable worship. Acceptable implies there is a form of worship that is not acceptable to God. Acceptable is also translated pleasing or agreeable to God.

What is acceptable worship and why is it necessary?

Before we look what is acceptable to God, let's look at what is not acceptable to God? A key and foundational text is from Exodus chapter twenty.

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God.”

Exodus 20: 4

In Deuteronomy chapter *twelve*, Moses tells the people of Israel these instructions about worship.

²⁹ *“When the Lord your God cuts off before you the nations whom you go in to dispossess, and you dispossess them and dwell in their land, ³⁰ take care that you be not ensnared to follow them, after they have been destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire about their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods?—that I also may do the same.’ ³¹ You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the Lord hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods.*

³² *“Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it. Deuteronomy 12: 29-32*

Two observations about unacceptable worship – false gods and false methods.

1. Don't inquire about gods of other nations because they are false gods.
 - a. I love the response of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego when they were commanded to worship a golden image. This is what they were told. *“But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?”¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to*

answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” What courage from these men. The reason we worship God is because he has already delivered us from sin’s penalty. And he has power to deliver from evil.

2. Don’t inquire about gods of the nations because they lead to false methods of worshipping the God of the Bible.
 - a. A few years ago, a completely unbiblical practice snuck its way into many churches. It was yoga. Churches began offering classes called Christian yoga or something like that. Completely not acceptable to God.

A third observation about unacceptable worship is false attitudes.

3. Our disposition is so critical in worship.
 - a. Last week, we observed that the sons of Aaron paid a cost for the wrong attitudes. And you may think this is Old Testament stuff, but worship in the New Testament is as crucial as in the Old Testament. Paul writes to the Corinthians about the Lord’s Supper. Communion is a form of worship. *“Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died”* 1 Corinthians 11:28-29. Some of have died? Why? Failure to examine, failure to discern the importance of the bread and the cup brought judgement on some people. What was the judgment? Some became weak, some ill and some even died.

What is acceptable worship?

Two key elements.

Reverence and Awe.

Reverence: We must worship with reverence. This is the word caution, discretion or respect for who God is. As a man, Jesus was heard by His Father because of his reverence. Hebrews 5:7

John MacArthur in his book titled *Worship the Ultimate Priority* says there are three dimensions to worship - the *outward* dimension, *inward* dimension and *upward* dimension. The outward dimension is doing good to all. The inward dimension is sharing blessings with your neighbors and the upward dimension is praising God. You can’t go wrong with that.

The *second* key element of acceptable worship is Awe.

There are some spectacular things in this world. A waterfall. A fifty-foot wave. A view of the mountains. Seeing the night sky and being enthralled by it. But there is nothing that is more awesome than God.

- *But the Lord of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.* Isaiah 8:13
- Paul's motivation for his preaching ministry was the awe of God in his life. *"Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others."* 2 Corinthians 5:11
- *The early believers were devoted to teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers and awe came upon every soul.* Acts 2:43
- After Jesus had forgiven the paralytic and healed him, the people responded this way *"And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, "We have seen extraordinary things today."* Luke 5:26

Why is acceptable worship necessary?

Hebrews 12:29 – "For God is a consuming fire." This is a reference from Deuteronomy chapter four twenty-four. *"the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God."*

This is who God is. A Jealous God. Last week, we saw that God is a Holy God, a Just God, a Loving God, a Merciful God. But God is also a Jealous God.

In what way is God jealous?

"Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. ⁵ Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"?" James 4:4-5

When you were born again, you were born from above. God put his Holy Spirit in you. And God longs for those in whom he has put his Spirit to offer Him pure devotion. God's jealousy is a holy jealousy. God desires that you worship him in the beauty of his holiness.

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: A Call to Acceptable Worship. Hebrews 12:28-29

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. What motivates you to worship God?

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

1. What are unacceptable and acceptable ways to worship God? Compare and contrast. Deuteronomy 4: 15-24, 12:29-32, Isaiah 8:13, Jeremiah 10:1-3, 1 Peter 3:15, Matthew 6:9, 1 Timothy 4:13, Ephesians 5:19, 2 Timothy 4:2
2. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

1. For personal reflection: Do you see any need to change the way you worship God? What will you do about it?