

Worship And Culture (Part 1)

What Is Acceptable Worship?

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Several years ago, my wife, Beth, was interested in putting our daughter, Courtney, into a dance class. Beth loves dance. If you were to come into our house and look around, you would see all the different ballet things all over the house. Every year, either for Mother's Day, or our anniversary, I add to the collection, because it tends to make her happy.

She had done some dancing when she was younger. Her mother had, also—some tap and others. Since it was somewhat of a tradition, she thought that she would put Courtney into a dance class and started looking around.

She checked for introductory dance lessons here and there. Of course, there were the normal ones that you could find just about anywhere, like general dance, where they teach many different types of steps. There were, of course, tap, ballet, and modern dance classes. She even found clogging, which you can find easily here in North Carolina, and that Irish high stepping dance, like River Dance.

In our home school newsletter, she found an AD that intrigued her. It was called praise dancing. What is praise dancing, you may ask? It is probably only available here in the Bible Belt. It was devised by fundamentalist Christians in reaction to the often-immoral culture of modern dance. Its aim is to express praise and worship to God through dance. They teach all these little kids how they might dance in church in their plays and recitals in honor of God.

As I said, I do not have an idea what this looked like. Maybe it was something like what Jethro's daughters did in *The Ten Commandments*. Remember that? I do not know; I never saw it. According to Beth, they used a combination of tap, ballet, and modern dance.

We decided not to enroll Courtney in that. She went into gymnastics instead.

Modern professing Christianity, especially of the more charismatic variety, is not limited to praise dancing in their experimentation of different forms of worship. In this same category of new cultural forms of worship would be praise bands. Our neighbor boy plays the electric guitar in a praise band. He practices religiously (pardon the pun). He seems not to be able to get enough of this.

Some of them do rock and roll in their praise bands! That is partly what is going on under that big blue tent right outside our office building here. Some local church group has set it up for their youth group, and part of that is their praise band. If anyone would visit some Wednesday night during a prayer meeting, you would hear something that passes for Christian rock and roll. David came in early this morning to rehearse, and told me that they were getting after it full blast.

Another thing you may have seen is some of the big churches, like Calvary, who have a drama troupe that does plays, especially during Christmas and Easter. They perform for their congregations, and the public for profit, as another form of worship.

There is even (if you watch NASCAR) "Racing for Jesus." Did you know that? That is an actual car on the track. It is usually the one that breaks first and goes out of the race. The man who owns it, Morgan Shepherd, a long-time NASCAR racer, lost his sponsorship and sponsors his own car, and it is "Racing for Jesus."

Everybody is trying to come up with ways to worship God using what we do now in our culture. I must ask the question, though: Are these forms of worship any different from years ago when they did snake handling or blue-grass gospel music to praise God? Is it really any different, or is it just its modern equivalent?

Charismatics consider these new worship forms to be more authentic. This is a common byword among them regarding different forms of worship. They think it is more authentic than the stilted, old-fashioned liturgical forms, into which we, the Church of God, would be grouped. They say that it is especially more authentic than what they call the highly mystical, liturgical forms that the mainline Protestants and the Catholics use—the traditional forms of the past century or so. That is a service led by a preacher or priest with certain psalms sung in a certain order, prayers given at a certain fixed time and place, a message is given from a pulpit or a lectern for a certain amount of time on a subject relevant to the time and season, and other things such as that which we have done for years and years.

The Charismatic idea lately is a free-flowing type of service. Sometimes it uses preaching, but usually it is very short. What makes it authentic to them having a person spontaneously do some worshipful activity. The idea here is that this shows that the Holy Spirit is working through them right there at the moment, and this is what they think God wants. Now, in this regard, sudden speaking in tongues would be part of this.

That is why I chose the term *Charismatics*. They seem to be most likely to be into this

sort of free-flowing, however-the-Holy-Spirit-guides-you type of worship service.

However, I must ask the question, "Even if they would seem more authentic—meaning they are what you really feel—are they legitimate forms of worship?" Who cares if you really feel them; would God accept them? Can we worship God using modern cultural forms like rock, rap, or hip-hop music? Can we use videos like Veggie Tales? Can we use computer games like God Speed or Ominous Horizons to worship God?

In a way I can say that these questions actually miss the point. I have already given you the real point. The question is, "What kind of worship will God accept?" not "What kind of worship seems authentic?" or "What kind of worship makes *us* feel good?" It is, rather, "What kind of worship will **God** accept?"

I want to use the sermon time today to try to answer this particular question by finding biblical principles in God's Word that will help us to determine whether anything that may be under investigation as a form of worship is acceptable in God's sight. We could say, by using our own judgment guided by God's Holy Spirit, yes or no to a particular thing that someone would want to do to worship God.

It is important that we understand the principles so that we can make these decisions without having to have a "thus saith the Lord." If you are going to do that, if you are going to require a "thus saith the Lord" on liturgical forms of worship, you are in for a big problem. There are not very many of them in the scripture. There are, however, a large number of principles.

First, we need some definitions. Part of the problem among modern Protestants is that many of them really do not understand what *worship* is. In many cases, they have put *worship* and *praise* together; therefore, *worship* and *praise* have become the same to them. However, this is not the case.

Praise is a subset of worship. It is not worship alone. In English, *worship* as a noun is from the Old English and is the combination of two words: *worthy* and *ship*. It became *worship*. *Ship* means "a state" or "a quality." Thus, *worship* means "the state or quality of being worthy." Webster's definition of *worship* is "reverence offered a divine being; or an act of expressing such reverence; a form of religious practice with its creed and ritual."

The verb form of *worship* means "to honor or reverence a divine being; to regard with great respect, honor or devotion; to perform or take part in worship, or an act of worship." That covers a whole gamut of things. *Worship*, in the way we use it, has devolved, primarily, into this last meaning, "to take part in worship, or an act of worship."

It is something that a Christian does in a church service. That is what worship has devolved to in the minds of most people: It is what you do when you go to church.

In the Old Testament, there are two primary words translated as *worship*. One is *sach'ah*, and it means "to bow down, or to prostrate oneself out of respect." It is a very clear, simple, concrete term. The second one is *ash'ab*, and it simply means "to serve," as a servant would serve his master.

If you would like some examples of these, remember my Trumpets sermon not too long ago regarding the Fall of Jericho. Joshua met the commander of the Lord's army outside of Jericho, and it says there that he fell on his face and worshipped. The word that is used there is *sach'ah*. He bowed down and prostrated himself out of reverence for Jesus Christ. That is found in Joshua 5:14.

Ash'ab is found in many places. This is probably the Hebrew term that is used most often in the Old Testament. You will find it in Exodus 3:12. Remember Moses found the burning bush; and when he came to it, God began speaking to him. It says that God told Moses to go into Egypt and to bring back the Israelites "**to serve God** on this mountain." That word *serve* is *ash'ab*. Throughout the Pentateuch, where it talks about the Levitical service, the Levites serving, the priests serving—all of those are forms of the word *ash'ab*. Those are, then, the two basic terms found in the Old Testament.

In the New Testament, there are three Greek terms most often translated into *worship*. There are other forms of these three, but I will just give you the basic ones. *Latreuo* is the first one. This equates with the Hebrew term *ash'ab*, which means "to serve." Just as in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, we are commanded to serve God. Whether in a ministerial function or not, we are all commanded to serve. It is often used of Christian worship. For instance, Romans 1:9, Paul says that he serves God in the Spirit. That is an easy one.

The second term is *sebomai*, and it means "to show reverence for." This may be the closest one to our word *worship*, at least in this definition. Yet, it often refers to worship of a pagan god, which is somewhat interesting. Although it can refer to reverence for the true God, it most often is found corresponding to bowing down to a pagan god like Jupiter or Diana or some other pagan god. The one place I know for sure where it means reverence to the true God is in Acts 18:7, where it talks about Justice being a man who worshipped God.

The most common Greek word for worship, found 60 times just in the New Testament, is *proskuneo*. It is another of those concrete terms. It means, "to kiss toward." It is

almost like blowing a kiss at someone. Of course, this originated in bowing down and kissing the earth in front of someone or something that one might worship, such as an Emperor or a false god.

Literally, it is "to kiss towards"; it came to mean, "to bow down" or "to worship." It is equivalent to the Hebrew term *sach'ah*. It always, 100 % of the time in the New Testament refers to worship directed to God. Occasionally, it means worship that should be directed to God if it is used in a negative, pagan type of context. It is someone showing that worship should be a certain way towards God.

Proskuneo can be a matter of personal, heartfelt worship; or it can be a public expression of individual or corporate worship. It is not limited just to one's personal, private worship. It can also be public, and it can also be corporate, meaning a whole church congregation, or group of people.

In Revelation, where it is found 24 times—more than one third of all the occurrences—it means "praise" or "adoration." Oftentimes, you see in Revelation the 24 elders worshipping God. That is *proskuneo*. They are praising and showing adoration for God and giving us an example.

We have just gone through all these words. It is pretty clear that *worship* is a fairly wide term. It has a lot of meaning; it covers a lot of ground. It goes from internal fear and reverence for God all the way to public displays of praise through prayer, word, song, bowing down in obeisance, and ministry such as preaching. Therefore, the concept of worship needs to be broader than the typical way that people think of it today. It is more than just what you do in a church service. It goes from the most inward feelings of reverence for God all the way to public and corporate displays.

If you want an overall definition of worship, this is the one we have learned in past messages: "Worship is fundamentally a person's response to God." It is what you do because of what God is or has done. One's response, then, could be all the way from inward fear and reverence to a public display, whether individual or corporate. "One's personal response to God" is a very good all-inclusive definition.

However, there is a caveat here: A person's response to God is not always acceptable. Just because one responds to God does not mean that it is proper worship. That is a very big caveat!

Let us begin searching through God's Word in Revelation 6:12-17. I thought of this one because I, about a week or so ago, finished my article on the sixth seal. I thought I could

use it here in this sermon because it shows you a response to God that is not acceptable.

Revelation 6:12-14 I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place.

Notice the breadth of humanity that is mentioned next:

Revelation 6:15-17 And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

What comes out in this passage is that these people realize that these events—the moon and sun changing color, the stars seemingly falling from the heavens, a great earthquake—are happening at the hand of God! God is behind these things; God's presence is in them. They recognize this. "Hide us from the Face of Him who sits on the throne [that is, the Father] and from the wrath of the Lamb [that is, the Son.]" They know exactly who is doing these things, and their response is, "Run away! Run away! Maybe He will not notice us here in the dark of a cave. Who is able to stand?"

Do you know what they are really saying? "All of us are guilty of sin. No one is going to be able to stand before God and say, 'I do not deserve this punishment! I have been a good person!'" Everybody is saying here that no one will be able to stand before God's judgment. Their response to God is instinctive. The drive to survive kicks in.

The pious, godly mind would say, "I am sorry, God. I have sinned. Please do what you must." A godly person would face God and say, "I am guilty. Please forgive me." He would repent in humble worship.

This same thing happens in chapter 16:

Revelation 16:8-9, 11 Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory...They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.

It is the same sort of thing as what happens in the sixth seal. Their reaction and response to God is incorrect and unacceptable. Just because they respond does not mean that it is something that God will accept.

This happened with Peter as well. Turn over to Luke 5, where he was being called by Jesus. Jesus performs a great miracle in his sight, and notice what Peter's reaction is:

Luke 5:4-5 When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net."

"I am the fisherman here. I do not know what you think you are doing, but, OK, I will do it."

Luke 5:6-8 And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

"Get out of here," he says. "I am a sinner, and you are pure. I do not like this comparison. All I want is for this feeling of shame and guilt to stop." Even though Peter had a great deal more understanding and fear of God than the people in Revelation 16, his instinctive reaction was the same as a carnal man, which he was. He wanted this shameful comparison between himself and God to end. Thus, he says, "Get out of here!"

Here is the first of the principles: **Carnal man's instinctive response to God is to hide from Him due to his sins.**

Do not limit this just to hiding. I just used this as an example and put it in the principle, but carnal man's instinctive response is to go away from God in any way. It is not just to hide; he wants to do the opposite. Because man is not of the same mind as He is, he wants to go another direction.

Turn over to Genesis 4. This is the example of Cain and Abel, which will lead up to the second principle. This is very soon after the creation, possibly only thirty years or so after. I do not know how old Cain and Abel were when this happened; it could have been many years.

Genesis 4:3-7 And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LOORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LOORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

So the LOORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."

It is very clear from the way that this is written that Cain and Abel had both been instructed about worshipping God. It was not that they did this on their own. It was not because Abel had a better idea than Cain on how to give an offering to God. Otherwise, God would have no right to accept one and reject the other. They would have been acting in ignorance, and it would not have been a big deal.

It is very clear from reading between the lines that they both knew, and Cain's offering fell short. It was not up to par; it was not what God said that He wanted. He wanted an offering of blood, or so it seems. It could be that there have been people who have made guesses about the differences between the offerings, but to me it is clear that God wanted an animal sacrifice. He clearly rejected Cain's offering, and called him down for it. The key to all of this is in verse 7. "If you do well, will you not be accepted?" If you follow the rules will not your worship meet the requirements?

"On the other hand, if you do not do well, sin lies at the door." In other words, there is a right way and there is a wrong way to worship God. The right way gives one acceptance before God, and the wrong way leads to sin and is sin. This is a very early object lesson from God, not just for Cain and Abel, but also for all of us—especially to all of us

instructed in God's way of life. We have a greater responsibility than those who do not know about the proper way to worship. We have to make sure that we follow what God has instructed for us to do. We ignore God's detailed, clear instructions regarding acceptable worship at our peril.

What happens? Sins just piled up on Cain. He ended up being a marked man. He ended up being the poster child for an anti-God way of life! Only God can define proper worship, and anything else borders on sheer blasphemy.

This was not the only time that God made this clear. As a matter of fact, it is all through the bible. God established this principle in Israel. It is part of their final instructions from Moses when they were about to go into the land.

Deuteronomy 12:28-32 "Observe and obey all these words which I command you, that it may go well with you and your children after you forever, when you do what is good and right in the sight of the LOORD your God. When the LOORD 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 LOORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LOORD 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."

God is very, very specific about this, and He hits it from both sides: "If you do what I say and you make sure that you observe these things very carefully, it will go well with you. When you come into the land, do not do anything as the pagans do it, because their practices are total abominations in His sight. You shall not worship the Lord God that way," He says. He does not want to be compared in any regard with pagan deities. There *is* no comparison. The way that they worship pagan deities has no comparison to the way that God has structured the worship of Him. He says, "You shall neither add to it, nor take away from what I have told you. That is the proper way to worship Me."

This is instructive: Go through the book of Deuteronomy, especially, with a highlighter of some type and mark every time that it says, "Be careful," or "Observe and obey all that I have commanded you." He is very pointed on this throughout the book of Deuteronomy. "I have given you the way to go, be careful to observe it in every respect." We cannot

just worship or serve Him in any old way, even if we think it is nice or venerable. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for their worship using the traditions of men. They were venerable old traditions that they were following, but they were wrong. They were not the way that God said to worship Him. Just because something is traditional does not make it right, nor does something seeming nice and feeling good make it right, either. That is not the standard.

The second principle is ***only God can define proper acceptable worship practices; anything else is sin.***

Turn to I Chronicles 13 as we lead up to another principle. This is David's bringing up of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. One would think that God would be very pleased with the thought and preparation that David and the people put into bringing the ark up to Jerusalem from Kirjath Jearim. You would think that God would be pleased that they had done this so that they could set up the tabernacle and whatnot in the capital city, but that is not what happened.

I Chronicles 13:1 Then David consulted with the captains of thousands and hundreds, and with every leader.

Notice that! With whom did David consult? His army officers and the civil leaders.

I Chronicles 13:2 And David said to all the assembly of Israel [now it appears that he is bringing in the people], "If it seems good to you, and if it is of the LORD our God, let us send out to our brethren everywhere who are left in all the land of Israel, and with them to the priests and Levites who are in their cities and their common-lands, that they may gather together to us..."

"Oh, yeah! Let us bring the Levites in here to Jerusalem and the priests, as well!"

I Chronicles 13:3-4 ...and let us bring the ark of our God back to us, for we have not inquired at it since the days of Saul. Then all the assembly said that they would do so, for the thing was right ***in the eyes of all the people.***

"Oh, yeah! This seems great! We have not done something like this for ages! It will be so much fun! We can have singing, dancing. We could have a great feast! We can bring all Israel here, and it will be a wonderful thing for uniting the nation! We just cannot wait!"

I Chronicles 13:5-6 So David gathered all Israel together, from Shihor in Egypt to as far as the entrance of Hamath, to bring the ark of God from Kirjath Jearim. And David and all Israel went up to Baalah [is that not interesting that the ark was there?], to [which was also called] Kirjath Jearim, which belonged to Judah, to bring up from there the ark of God the LOORD, who dwells between the cherubim, where His name is proclaimed.

This is not very far from Jerusalem, somewhat to the west, and down the hill—maybe five miles. It was not a long journey at all.

I Chronicles 13:7-8 So they carried the ark of God on a new cart from the house of Abinadab, and Uzza and Ahio drove the cart. Then David and all Israel played music before God with all their might, with singing, on harps, on stringed instruments, on tambourines, on cymbals, and with trumpets.

They really got into it!

I Chronicles 13:9-10 And when they came to Chidon's threshing floor, Uzza put out his hand to hold the ark, for the oxen stumbled. Then the anger of the LOORD was aroused against Uzza, and He struck him because he put his hand to the ark; and he died there before God.

Tragedy strikes! Oh, this was such a great idea! Everybody put his heart into it! They were so sincere about getting the ark back to Jerusalem and reestablishing Israelite worship, and God had to go and spoil everything by killing the cart driver! He was a real party-pooper, was He not? Not on your life! It was something more than just the fact that these people were having a good time, even more than that these people were thinking that they were doing God a service.

They had not consulted the Levites. It says that they invited them up to the celebration, but they had not consulted them. It is interesting to note, also, that Uzza and Ahio were Jews. They were not Levites. Remember it said that the ark was in Kirjath Jearim, in Judah. It was not a city of refuge, it was not a city of the Levites.

Go back to Numbers 4. This is instruction about the duties of the sons of Kohath—Levites.

Numbers 4:4-5 This is the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of meeting, relating to the most holy things: When the camp prepares to journey, Aaron and his sons shall come, and **they** [the priests, Aaron's sons] shall [1] take down the covering veil and cover the ark of the Testimony with it. [2] Then they shall put on it a covering of badger skins, and [3] spread over that a cloth entirely of blue; and then they shall insert its poles.

This was done out of the sight of everybody, even the other sons of Kohath. This had to be done strictly by the priests. You will notice there that there are three coverings on the ark of the Testimony. There are the veil, the badger skins, and the blue cloth. No one was to look upon the ark, except the priests, even when it was out of the most holy place.

Numbers 4:15 And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, when the camp is set to go, then the sons of Kohath shall come to carry them; but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die. These are the things in the tabernacle of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry.

Why did God strike Uzza down? Nothing had been done properly! Not a single thing! Not even the fact that they brought it back was right. In neither I Chronicles 13 nor II Samuel 6 does it say that David consulted with God. David had not asked God whether it should be brought up from Kirjath Jearim. They had not consulted with the Levites or the sons of Kohath or the priests to figure out how this was to be done. They simply picked it up, put it in a cart, and drove it back! Then, Uzza had the audacity to touch it with his hand, even just to steady it!

He did not even think that God could protect His own ark! I have heard my dad say before that the ground was holier than Uzza was. Had it hit the ground it would have been better than him touching it. All of these things that they did were strictly forbidden in the law—and they thought that they were worshipping God. All the music and dancing in honor of God meant nothing to Him in the light of all the glaring disobedience that they were doing while they were dancing and singing and shouting praises to God.

They felt good doing it. They were sincere, but the whole manner of what they did was wrong from the start. We cannot worship God as we see fit! Our worship has to conform to His way, down to the details.

There is also the example of Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10. I want to go quickly through it because it says something very pointed about the way that we have to approach the service of God and the worship of God.

Leviticus 10:1 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 LOORD, which He had not commanded them.

What they had done was take coals from a common, regular fire to light this incense rather than the fire that God Himself had lit for that specific purpose.

Leviticus 10:2-3 So fire went out from the LOORD and devoured them, and they died before the LOORD. And Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LOORD spoke, saying [this was a direct communication from God, "through me to you, Aaron"], 'By those who come near Me [to worship] I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified.'" So Aaron held his peace.

Aaron shut his mouth, and did not say a word of complaint.

We have to understand that our worship of God has to be up to the same level, as much as lies within us, to the holiness of God Himself. God will not be worshipped in any profane way because He is holy and must be shown to be holy before all the people. People who come to worship before God must have the attitude of holiness. "By those who come near Me, I must be regarded as holy."

The third principle is that ***God is extremely interested in even the details of proper worship, and He exacts penalties when we ignore them.***

The reason He exacts penalties is that we demean Him when we do that.

The next principle can be found in Malachi. After the Jews returned from the Exile, from all that we can tell, Ezra was in charge of overseeing the setting up of the priesthood and the Levitical system. He set up everything properly. However, after his death and Nehemiah's governorship, the worship of God in the Temple degenerated. Then comes Malachi. Malachi is the last of the Old Testament prophets. He did his work somewhere between 450 B.C. and 430 B.C.

Malachi 1:6-14 "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honor? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence? says the LOORD of hosts to you priests who despise My name. Yet you say, 'In what way have we despised Your name?' [God responds,] You offer defiled food on My altar. But say, 'In what way have we defiled You?' By saying, 'The table of the LOORD is contemptible. And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?' says the LOORD of hosts. "But now entreat God's favor, that He may be gracious to us. While this is being done by your hands, will He accept you favorably?" says the LOORD of hosts. "Who is there even among you who would shut the doors, so that you would not kindle fire on My altar in vain? I have no pleasure in you," says the LOORD of hosts, "Nor will I accept an offering from your hands. For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations," says the LOORD of hosts. "But you profane it, in that you say, 'The table of the LOORD is defiled; and its fruit, its food, is contemptible.' You also say, 'Oh, what a weariness!' and you sneer at it," says the LOORD of hosts. "And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; thus you bring an offering! Should I accept this from your hand?" says the LOORD. "But cursed be the deceiver who has in his flock a male, and takes a vow, but sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished—for I am a great King," says the LOORD of hosts, "and My name is to be feared among the nations.

Do you understand what God was complaining about? The priests and the people during the time of Malachi were going about the worship of God in a lackadaisical, ho-hum, it-does-not-matter sort of way. They were offering up any old thing to God, and God was saying that He cannot accept this. "It is even less that what your governor would accept at his table, and I am the greatest King of All!"

People had begun to offer just about anything on the altar, and the priests, whose job it was in the law to inspect and reject any unfit animal (which we could go through if we wanted), were giving a pass to them. They were to say, "No, that is not acceptable. God will accept only a perfect animal." No, they were permitting them to be offered as a sacrifice to God. It did not mean anything to them.

Through Malachi's preaching God corrected this with some pretty harsh language. He told them right out that He was not accepting them. Instead of giving Him honor, they

were showing contempt. It is not good enough just to go through the motions of worship. Everything that we do and bring before God in form of worship has to be top quality.

This is why I sometimes get a bit upset at the song service. People do not even put their heart into the song service, and that is one of the primary areas in which we get to worship God publicly. Who cares if you cannot sing? Who cares if your voice is not good? You might laugh about "making a joyful noise." God means it! He is more interested in your heart and that feeling of awe and reverence and praise that comes out in song.

A rule of thumb is given here in Malachi: If our service, our offering, our act would not please a normal human being like a governor, it will certainly not please God. If we were assigned to go up to Washington, D.C., and present a choral program before the President, do you think that our singing would please him? If we had a song leader directing one of our hymns before the President, would he applaud enthusiastically after he had heard us? This is something to think about. Do we put our all even into the song service? Do we present God with a contemptible offering?

There is another one in Exodus 30. This is something private for the most part, but along the same lines. These are the instructions that God gave to Moses about the making of the incense. Incense is a biblical symbol of prayer. I want you to look and see the care, the work, and the quality that goes into preparing the incense and then compare it to your own prayers. This is the same sort of thing that we were talking about in Malachi 1. It is just a different area.

Exodus 30:34-38 And the LORD said to Moses: "Take sweet spices, stacte and onycha and galbanum, and pure frankincense with these sweet spices; there shall be equal amounts of each. You shall make of these an incense, a compound according to the art of the perfumer, salted, pure, and holy. And you shall beat some of it very fine, and put some of it before the Testimony in the tabernacle of meeting where I will meet with you. It shall be most holy to you. But as for the incense which you shall make, you shall not make any for yourselves, according to [this] its composition. It shall be to you holy for the LORD. Whoever makes any like it, to smell it, he shall be cut off from his people."

That is interesting, is it not? Think of this incense in terms of prayer. Do we dedicate our prayers to God and "beat" them fine? Are they a sweet aroma before God? Are they all about us? Are they done like the Pharisees'—in a grandiose manner to please

ourselves? This is something I wanted to lay out before you in terms of worship. Our prayers are one of our primary forms of worship. Do we take this kind of care with our prayers? I do not do this perfectly, either; it is something I must continue to work on. This is the kind of thing that God wants us to do.

Talking about breaking our prayers down fine, what about breaking our entire worship down fine—so that we really think about the details of what we are doing, understanding before Whom these forms of worship are going? He is a great King! He will be revered and upheld and shown to be holy before everyone. That is the way that He wants it! That is the way that He has instructed us to do it.

The fourth principle is that ***our service and worship of God must meet certain very high standards.***

Some would argue that these Old Testament instructions mean little for us today under the New Covenant, but that is a bogus argument.

Acts 24:14 But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect [meaning true Christianity], so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets.

Do not let anybody—Protestant, Catholic, or whatever—tell you that the things written in the law and prophets have nothing to do with New Testament, New Covenant worship. Paul said that he believed everything in the Law and Prophets, and he used them in his worship.

John 4:19-24 The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. 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. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

The basic concept that Jesus is trying to impress on this woman at the well is that because He is going to be the Sacrifice—the Redeemer—the worship of God would be

expanded from its limited venue in Jerusalem in the Temple to universal. True worshippers would be able to worship the Father anywhere, at any time. He describes that kind of worship as "in spirit and in truth." Many find this phrase *in spirit and in truth* to be enigmatic, but it does not have to be.

The *truth* part of it is easy. It means "according to the truth" or "according to God's instructions." True worshippers will worship God according to His instructions. I have used most of this sermon covering this aspect of it—worshipping God according to His instructions. Jesus is warning here that we cannot freelance our worship even under the New Covenant. It still must meet those exacting standards.

In spirit can mean a couple of things. It probably includes both of these elements. Spirit is contrasted with the material and physical—the way that both the Samaritans and the Jews were worshipping. The essence of godly worship is found in the spirit—the attitude, the heart, the sincerity—of the worshipper. It is no longer carnal but spiritual. It is no longer physical but spiritual. It is no longer outward, necessarily, but the emphasis is placed on the inward and the changing of the man. It is the new-man-versus-the-old-man sort of thing. Outward rites and rituals and physical services such as those being performed at the Temple become secondary to our inner reverence to God and our constant spiritual relationship with God. That is what takes priority under the spirit. What He is alluding to is total submission and obedience to God in heart and mind. Out of that will spring true worship. When He says, "God is Spirit," it is an additional help to understanding what true worship is.

This is the second part of it: It has to be through the Holy Spirit. Our worship has to be done in the spirit—through the Holy Spirit. Only the called and the converted have access to the Holy Spirit; therefore, only they can truly worship God. Only those who have God's Spirit are the true worshippers of God. It cannot be done through any other kind of spirit—the human spirit or the spirit of Satan. Our worship has to be on a different level—God's Spirit.

Because the Spirit that we are given is the vehicle of communication between God and man, an acceptable response to God can flow only through God's Spirit given to us so that we might have a relationship with Him. Yes, it has to do with sincerity; it has to do with having a heart and mind and attitude that is right; but it also has to be through God's Spirit. Somebody out there in the world cannot really worship God in spirit and truth because he does not have the means to communicate with God. He has been cut off, and Jesus is saying that with His sacrifice that way was going to be opened more generally.

The fifth principle is that ***New Testament worship emphasizes inward reverence for God and righteous obedience to His instructions.***

Since I have run out of time, I want to give you a quick list of the forms of worship found in the New Testament. There are only five of them in basic, general categories.

1) Obedience to God's Commands.

Matthew 28:19-20 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

2) Prayer.

I Thessalonians 5:17 ...pray without ceasing...

This includes rejoicing and giving God gratitude.

3) Singing

Ephesians 5:19 ...speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord...

4) Preaching.

II Timothy 4:1-2 I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

5) Good works.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

That is the list: Obedience, prayer, singing, preaching, and good works. With the five principles included, then, we should be able to determine whether a form of worship is acceptable to God. Perhaps the most important one is that our expressions of worship must pass God's extremely high standards. We should strive in everything we do—in every act of worship—for perfection because God Himself is Perfection. A standard of just "all right" will not do.

I want to finish with Psalm 100:

Psalm 100:1-5 Make a joyful shout to the LOORD, all you lands! Serve the LOORD with gladness; come before His presence with singing. Know that the LOORD, He *is* God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the LOORD is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations.