

Can Worship Be Unacceptable By Trey Sullins

Since the very beginning of time, God has required His people to worship Him. In John 4:24 the Bible says God is seeking those who will worship Him. Even more, the text in verse 23 says that God is not seeking just any kind of worshipers, but true worshipers. A true worshiper is someone who worships God according to the plan and pattern which He has commanded. Christians need to understand that worship can be unacceptable so that we can ensure that our worship is acceptable to God.

There are many examples of unacceptable worship in the Old Testament. Genesis 4 brings to us our first unacceptable worshiper. Cain and Abel were brothers and sons of Adam and Eve. Abel was a “keeper of sheep” while Cain was a “tiller of the ground” (Genesis 4:2). Cain and Abel eventually brought their offerings before the Lord and the Bible says, “the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering” (Genesis 4:4-5). The New Testament reveals that Abel was righteous in Hebrews 11:4; in 1 John 3:12 Cain’s works are called evil. Continuing to Leviticus 10 we find Nadab and Abihu. These were priests and sons of Aaron. They came before the Lord in Leviticus 10:1 by offering profane fire to God. After they did this “fire went out from the Lord and devoured them” (Leviticus 10:2). The book of Acts contains another account of unacceptable worship. Paul in the city of Athens comes across a people who were worshipping “to the unknown God” (Acts 17:23). Paul clearly recognized this as a problem because in the Areopagus he began to proclaim to them “the One whom you worship without knowing” (Acts 17:23). There are many more examples, but one alone shows us enough to understand that worship can be unacceptable.

After looking at these accounts, what is it that caused these people’s worship to be unacceptable? As for Cain’s worship an exact answer is not revealed within the text, but what is certain is Cain offered something that He knew was not sufficient. Further evidence of a major heart and attitude problem in Cain is found in Genesis 4:5 where immediately after being told about his rejected offering Cain becomes angry. Nadab and Abihu’s offering was not acceptable because they went outside the authority God had given them. Going all the way back to the law of Moses we find strict instructions for how the priests were to conduct the worship to God. Perhaps out of arrogance or laziness they chose to use a fire that was not commanded and thus God rejected their worship to Him. Again, when we look back to Paul in Acts 17, we find the answer to why their worship was intolerable. Consider that these people in Athens were already worshipping this unknown God. If their worship was accepted, then Paul was wasting his time by proclaiming the true God to them. The Holy Spirit would not have guided Paul into such a worthless endeavor; therefore, it must be the case that the Athenian worship was not satisfactory to God. These people were worshipping numerous gods and in numerous ways not prescribed by the one true God. In all three of these instances what made their worship wrong was that it was not done according to the instruction and command of God.

Let us never be like those whom Jesus spoke of in Matthew 15:8-9, “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.” A people like that are devoted to living and

worshiping only in the way that they choose. The language in John 4:23-24 indicates to us that God wants a people worshiping properly. For Christians, this means that we must learn, understand, and obey the exact orders of God in order to worship acceptably.