

WHEN IS WORSHIP UNACCEPTABLE TO GOD?

2 KINGS 17:24-41

INTRODUCTION

There are many in this world who would have us to believe that our God is no better than another person's god who happens to be different from our God.

There are those who would say to us, *"If you worship the God of the Bible, that's fine, but don't think that your worship is anymore sacred than someone who worships the god of the Koran or some other god or gods."*

Also, in the minds of this politically correct world we live in, our attempts to evangelize those who worship a different god or who don't approach the God of the Bible the same way that we do is looked at as being religious bigotry. That is because these folks see all gods and religions as being on an even plain and equally acceptable.

(Remember the flack some years ago that the Southern Baptist had to endure over their effort to evangelize Jewish people. Also, after the 9-11 tragedy, there were those who said that Christians should try to understand the Muslim faith, not try to convert them.)

Well, let's ask this question. Is all worship acceptable to the one true God of the universe? Of course, the answer to that question is a resounding "No!"

Well, isn't the important thing just to be sincere in your worship? Again, the answer is "No!"

In our text, we find that the ten northern tribes of Israel have been conquered by Assyria. After the conquest, most of the people of Israel were taken into captivity to Assyria.

In their place, Assyria imported captives from other countries to live in Samaria, which was the main province of the northern ten tribes of Israel at that time.

Read: 2 Kings 17:24-41

Here we see that the religion of those who were imported into Samaria is described at length.

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I pose to you two questions to ponder: **1) When is worship unacceptable to God?** Along with that, **2) What is acceptable worship?** We will address the first question first question this morning:

I. WHEN IT IS BASED ON THE WRONG KIND OF FEAR!

A. Notice Various Statements That Are Made Here In The Scriptures:

1. Look at Vs 32—Does that seem strange to you? It does to me!
2. Look at Vs 33—*"They feared the LORD, and served their own gods..."* What??? Something is not right!
3. Look at Vs 41—*"So these nations feared the LORD, and served their graven images. . ."* Does something seem wrong here!?
4. They had a fear of the LORD, but it was the wrong kind of fear. Vs 34
5. Is this a contradiction? Not at all!

B. There Is An Improper Kind Of Fear Of The LORD!

1. Would the Samaritans have ever thought about the LORD, had it not been for the lions. Probably not! (Vs 25-26)
2. When they finally did think of Him, it was only to tremble before Him.
3. This is like so many people today who only think of God when they are sick, or injured, or on a death bed, but forgetting Him when they are well.

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4. When the good times are rolling you can't find them in Church because they are out serving their other gods, but when their world comes crashing down around them, then they begin to think about the LORD.
5. Many times after things get turned around for them, then you can't find them again.

They pray fervently to God for deliverance while a storm rages in their lives, making vows and promises to God.

But as soon as the storm is over, it is as if they forgot what brought the storm in the first place.
6. Listen, if we turn to God only when things go wrong, our religion is no different than these Samaritans in our text!

There Is An Improper Kind Of Fear Of The LORD!

C. **There Is A Proper Kind Of Fear Of The LORD!**

1. **Solomon Taught About The Fear Of The LORD!**

Proverbs 1:7--“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

Ecclesiastes 8:12-13--“Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God.”

2. **Jesus Taught About The Fear Of The LORD!**

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Matthew 10:28--“And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

3. **Peter Taught About The Fear Of The LORD!**

Acts 10:34-35--“Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.”

4. **What Is This Proper "Fear Of The Lord?"**

- a. Is it the kind of fear that never thinks of God when things are going well, and then trembles at the prospect of facing God? NO!
- b. It is the kind of awesome reverence towards God that motivates us to turn away from evil and serve God faithfully at all times.
- c. With the proper kind of fear (awesome reverence), we will draw close to God through obedience; and when we do so, we will find Him to be so gracious and loving that we will serve Him out of love and not just a fear of judgment. (Look at **1 John 4:16-18**)

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II. **WHEN IT IS BASED MORE ON FORM THAN ON SUBSTANCE!**

John 4:24--“They that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.”

A. **Their Hearts Were Not In Their Service To The LORD!**

1. This is shown by the fact that they continued to serve their "graven images". Vs 29, 33-35, 41

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2. What service they did render to the LORD possessed form—they were going through the motions. However their worship lacked any real substance.

B. The Same Type Of Worship Can Be Observed Today!

1. There is a lot of form, but not very much substance in much of what is called worship today.
2. Now don't get me wrong, there is a need for some form in our worship.
 - a. Because we possess both a physical and spiritual nature, we need physical ways to express our spiritual devotion to the LORD.
 - b. That is why God has provided us with physical expressions even in our New Testament worship.
 - c. Singing, praying, giving, saying "Amen!", The Lord's Supper—these all have "form."
 - d. But for us to go through the form of worship without the substance (a right heart attitude and spirit) is hypocritical. Is it not?
Look at **Matthew 15:7-8**
3. As Christians, are we guilty of worshiping God the wrong way?
 - a. Do We Sing "Trust and Obey", But We Do Neither?
 - b. Do We Sing "Rescue the Perishing," But Never Do Anything To Rescue Those Who Are Perishing.

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- c. Do We Sing "Amazing Grace," But It Is No Longer Amazing.
4. Worship that has both form and substance will follow the example of the psalmist David.
 - a. *Psalm 138:1*—"I will praise thee with my whole heart ..."
 - b. *Psalm 146:1-2*—"Praise ye the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul. While I live will I praise the LORD: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being."
 - c. *Psalm 147:1*—"Praise ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely."

C. We Need To Ask Ourselves, "Is Our Worship One Of Simply Going Through The Motions?" "Is It Mostly Just Form With Little, Or No Substance?"

If all we have is form, and our heart is not really in what we are doing, then our worship is no more pleasing to God than that of these Samaritans was!

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III. WHEN IT IS BASED ON FUTILE EFFORTS! (i.e. VANITY)

John 4:24—"They that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

- A. The Samaritans Had God And They Had "gods." Vs 41a**
They gave God lip service, but they gave their "gods" their true service.

The result is that their worship of the one true God was useless, pointless, empty, worthless, and ineffective, because it wasn't based in truth.

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Our God is a jealous God! He will not share His glory!

B. The Same Thing Can Happen To Christians Today!

1. There are many who seek to “serve God” while also serving worldly ambitions!

Their idols are not graven images, but rather possessions, pleasures, promotion, power and other such things that are not normally thought of as gods.

Anything that takes the rightful place of God in our lives—whether it takes the time, treasure, or devotion that belong to Him alone—has become an idol.

Many say “God has a place in my life!” But, an examination of their lives reveals that though God may have a place, He does not have not first place!

What did Jesus say about this?

Matthew 6:24— “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

When people try to serve both the world and God, the world always wins and God loses out!

2. There are others who seek to “serve God” while their lives are full of known sin!

These folks seek to rationalize and minimize their disobedience.

C. Compromise In The Areas Of Service And Sin Are Unacceptable With God!

1. God Requires Our Total Commitment To Him No Matter The Cost!

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Deuteronomy 6:5— “And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.”

Deuteronomy 6:14-15— “Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you; (For the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth.”

Jesus said in Luke 14:33-- “So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.”

2. For God Not To Have Our Total Commitment Is To Commit Spiritual Adultery!

James 4:4— “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?

whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God..”

3. We Must Heed What Jesus Said In *Matthew 6:33— “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness...”*

CONCLUSION

Search your own heart today and be honest with yourself before God. Is your worship closer to these Samaritans than it should be?

In an earlier time, Elijah said in *1 Kings 18:21— “. . . How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him.”*

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How is your worship? Do you fear the LORD and serve other gods? God is waiting on your worship to conform to His design for worship. What is that design? *In John 4:24– “They that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.”*

I know one thing for sure. You can't worship God this morning if you are still dead in your trespasses and sins. Your first need is for you to repent of your sin and trust Christ for your salvation! He will give you spiritual life so that you can truly worship God!