

Acceptable Worship

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5/2/2010

Who?

Worship should be offered to Jehovah God, not to mankind, mammon, or any material object (Matt. 4:8-10; Acts 7:41-43; Rom. 1:24-25). The Lord accepts the worship of the righteous (Psa. 24:3-6; 141:1-4; 145:17-21), but the service and sacrifice of the wicked is rejected (Prov. 15:8, 29; 28:9).

What?

Several Greek word families are used in Scripture to communicate the concept of worship.

- *Latreuō* means “to serve,” and describes the carrying out of religious duties. So likewise, *latreia*, derived from *latreuō*, refers to “service/worship” that is offered to God.
- *Proskuneō* means “to express in attitude or gesture one’s complete dependence on or submission to a high authority figure, (fall down and) worship, do obeisance to, prostrate oneself before, do reverence to...” [BDAG]. In like manner, *proskunētēs*, derived from *proskuneō*, refers to “a worshiper.”
- *Sebō* means “to worship,” i.e., “to express in gestures, rites, or ceremonies one’s allegiance or devotion to deity...” *Sebazomai*, derived from *sebō*, means “to fear, specifically to have reverential awe” i.e., “to show reverence to, worship.”

Broadly speaking, there are five acts of worship in both the Old and New Covenants. In the Old Testament, faithful Israelites offered up praise (singing/instrumental music), prayer, the proclamation of God’s word, sacrifice, and tithing. Similarly, in the New Testament, faithful Christians engage in praise (singing), prayer, preaching, observance of the Lord’s supper, and giving (Acts 2:42; 12:5; 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:20-26; 16:1-2; Eph. 5:18-20; Col. 3:16-17; Heb. 2:10-13).

When?

In the Old Testament, collective worship was offered on designated Holy Days: annual festivals, new moons, sabbaths, etc. (Exod. 20:8-11; 23:14-17; Lev. 23:26-32).

In the New Testament, worship is offered on the first day of the week, and whenever God’s people assemble (Heb. 10:19-25). Singing, prayers and the proclamation of God’s word may occur at any time (Acts 16:25-26); however, observance of the Lord’s supper and giving should take place on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2).

Where?

Some mistakenly argue that everything we do is worship. However, the Genesis account of the offering of Isaac reveals the fallacy of this assertion: While Abraham readily engaged in all necessary preparation, worship was considered a distinct and unique act of obedience (Gen. 22:1-14).

In the Old Testament, God's people could offer up prayers and praise in any time and any place. They could proclaim and ponder divine revelation in a variety of circumstances. However, sacrifice and tithing were offered in the place of God's choosing (Deut. 12:1-19); so likewise, the annual festivals of Passover (Deut. 16:1-8), Pentecost (Deut. 16:9-12), and Tabernacles (Deut. 16:13-17).

Eventually, God chose Jerusalem and Mt. Zion as the permanent place where such worship should be offered (2 Chron. 7:11-18; Psa. 78:67-72). While praise may be offered individually, it regularly occurs in the public assembly (2 Chron. 29:28-30; Neh. 5:13; Psa. 22:22, 25; cf. Heb. 2:10-13; Psa. 35:18; 89:5; 107:32; 111:1; 149:1; etc.).

In the New Testament, worship is not connected with a specific/exclusive physical location, like the city of Jerusalem (John 4:20-24). Saints were scattered throughout the world (Mal. 1:11; 1 Tim. 2:8). Thus, we read of the church of God at Corinth, Philippi, the seven churches of Asia Minor, etc. (1 Cor. 1:1-2; Phil. 1:1-2; Rev. 1:10-11).

Three of the five acts of worship (singing, praying, and preaching) can be done any time, any place, and in any gathering. However, two of the five (giving and the Lord's supper) are done on the first day of the week in the local assembly (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2).

How?

During the Old Testament dispensation, the people of God worshipped as He directed (Deut. 4:1-2). Consider the rejected offering of Cain (Gen. 4:1-7; Heb. 11:4). Consider the condemnation of Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1-2; Exod. 30:1-10). Consider the curse that befell Uzziah (2 Chron. 26:16-21).

In the New Testament dispensation, the same principle applies: true worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth, i.e., with a proper disposition and according to the divine pattern (John 4:23-24). Consider the example of apostate Israel (Matt. 15:1-9). Consider the example of the Judaizers (Phil. 3:2-11). Consider the example of the Gnostics (Col. 2:18-23).

Why?

God is worthy of praise because of His protection and providential concern (2 Sam. 22:1-4; Psa. 18:1-3). God the Father is worthy of praise because He created all things (Rev. 4:5-11). Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, is worthy of praise because of His wonderful sacrifice (Rev. 5:6-14).