

What's more, they viewed worship as a tiresome chore. God's response to them? "Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates, that you might not uselessly kindle fire on My altar!" (verse 10). Their worship des-pised and profaned God's name, and He would not ac-cept it. The "how" mattered.

Ask the disciples at Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:17-18; ch. 14). The assemblies of the Corinthians did "more harm than good" (1 Cor 11:17 NIV). Why? Because they weren't doing what they were supposed to be doing! "Therefore when you meet together," wrote Paul, "it is not to eat the Lord's Supper..." (v 20). They were disregarding both their fellow saints and the purpose of their gathering. Paul went on to warn that such assemblies would result in condemnation, not glory (vv 27, 29, 34). Merely calling it "worship" or "the Lord's Supper" didn't make it so. The "how" mattered.

Now think for a minute about all of these examples. Why was their worship rejected? Some of them had impure motives, but the common factor is that they ignored God's commands. Did Nadab and Abihu act out of blatant contempt for God? Or were they just so caught up in the moment that they decided their zeal was more important than where the fire came from? Either way, they died because they acted without God's authority. Would sincerity have made any of these acts of disobedience okay? Of course not! Even with the noblest of intentions, Jeroboam's innovations still would have defied God's law; Uzziah's incense still would have been unauthorized; the blemished sacrifices of Malachi's people still would have been unacceptable; and the Corinthians' pot luck still would not have been the Lord's Supper. The "how" mattered.

Does it matter how I worship? Jesus says yes. "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:24). Worship is not about my personal preferences, because I am not the object of worship. God is! Worship is about what He desires. Acceptable worship requires both a pure heart and right actions. If we want to truly praise and honor God, then we will want to do it in the way He has instructed. The "how" matters.

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THINGS ABOVE

"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.
Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth."
— Colossians 3:1, 2 —

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Does It Matter How I Worship?

By Jeff Himmel

These days a lot of churches advertise two or even three worship assemblies on Sunday morning, each with a different format. One church's sign promises a "traditional" service at 8:00 AM, a "distinctive" service at 9:30, and a "classic" service at 11:00.

I don't know the specific differences between these formats, but I do know the reason for them: people have developed a consumer mentality about worship. They view worship as mostly a matter of personal preference, like what kind of car you drive or which radio station

you listen to. God should be the focus, but the rest is up to our individual (or congregational) tastes. And if that is so, then why not have multiple formats to appeal to our varied appetites?

To some folks, what we do in worship makes no difference as long as we're sincere. To others, what's in our hearts and minds matters little as long as we're doing the right things. In either case, the attitude is the same: as long as I call it worship to God, the how is of no consequence.

But what does God's word say? Does it matter how I worship?

Ask Cain (Genesis 4). Cain and his brother Abel offered sacrifices to God. Cain, a farmer, brought an offering of "the fruit of the ground." Abel, a shepherd, offered "the firstlings of his flock" (vv 3-4). God "had regard for" (*i.e.*, accepted) Abel and his offering, but not Cain and his offering (vv 4-5).

God rejected Cain's worship. Why? It was not personal favoritism (*see* Ac 10:34). No, God admonished Cain, "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it" (Gen 4:7 NIV). Since sin by definition is a breach of Divine law (Rom 5:13b), we can only conclude that something about Cain's worship was not in keeping with God's instructions. Was it what he offered, or how he offered it, or perhaps his attitude? We may not know exactly how Cain disobeyed God in his worship, but he did — "his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous" (1 Jn 3:12). The "how" certainly mattered in Cain's case.

Ask Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10). When Aaron and his sons were consecrated as priests to God, they offered sin offerings and burnt offerings in accordance with God's directions. As a show of Divine approval, "the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. Then fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar" (Lev 9:23-24). But then, "Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective fire pans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. And fire came out

from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord" (Lev 10:1-2).

God rejected (and punished) the worship of Aaron's boys. Why? Because they presented "unauthorized fire...which He had not commanded them to do" (HCSB). Whatever their motivation was (the text doesn't tell us), they offered worship in a way that was without Divine authority. In doing so, they failed to honor God as holy (v 3). The "how" of worship mattered a great deal in their case.

Ask King Jeroboam (1 Kings 12). When Israel divided into two kingdoms, Jeroboam became the first king in the north. Right away he set about making changes to God's order of things (vv 28-32). In the cities of Dan and Bethel he set up golden calves and altars for worship. He instituted a new religious feast day in the eighth month of the year. He appointed priests from all the various tribes of Israel. Supposedly it was still Jehovah who was being worshiped, but Jeroboam had changed where, when, and how — and they were not what God's law specified.

What was the Lord's evaluation? The text says, "This thing became a sin" (v 30), and the next chapter reports that God sent a prophet to cry out against Jeroboam's innovations. The "how" mattered.

Ask King Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:16-17). In the midst of a prosperous reign, Judah's king Uzziah "entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense." The high priest Azariah and eighty of his companions opposed the king: "It is not for you . . . to burn incense to the Lord, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron" (v 18). Azariah told the king, "You have been unfaithful and will have no honor from the Lord God." The writer of Chronicles says that "his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly." In Uzziah, personal arrogance and disrespect for Divine authority went hand in hand. As punishment for his unauthorized action, Uzziah was stricken with leprosy until the day he died. The "how" mattered.

Ask Malachi (Malachi 1:6-14). This prophet complained that the priests of Judah presented defiled sacrifices to God. They offered animals that were blind, lame, or sick — a direct violation of God's law.