

Worship the King

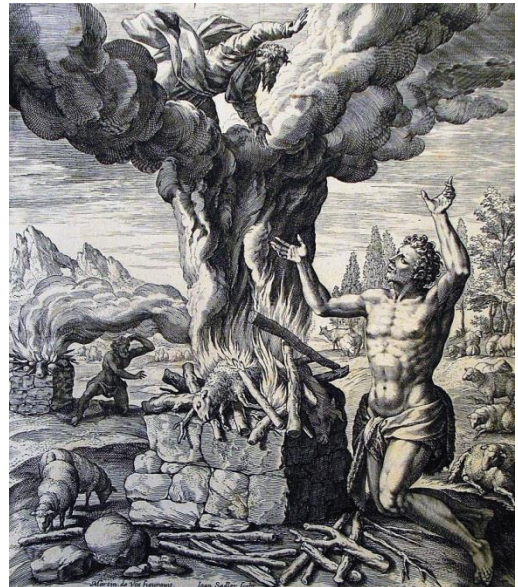
Part 1 – The Worship War

“To be human is to worship” – Daniel Block

Genesis 4:1-7

Worship has been a controversial issue within the church for years. Over the past several decades much has been written about the so-called “worship wars.” New songs or old songs? Band or choir? To drum or not to drum? Churches have split over such questions. The Protestant Reformation of the 16th century was as much about reforming the church’s worship as it was about reforming the church’s doctrine. But battles over worship have been around far longer than 500 years. Indeed, the war over worship has been going on since Lucifer decided that he deserved a share of the praise given to God. And that same sinful impulse has been within the heart of man ever since the fall.

The first murder in human history was due in part to unacceptable worship (Gen 4). Cain, enraged by the fact that God rejected his offerings while accepting those of Abel, murdered his brother. And we have been fighting over worship ever since. We should not be surprised that our enemy labors so effectively to divide us over this most essential, joy-giving, health-making, and God-glorifying activity. May God grant us humility and hearts full of obedience to him and service to each other as we endeavor to worship the Lord together.



Main Idea: Since God created us for worship and he alone determines the acceptability of worship let us turn away from our own desires and demands to go to the Lord on his terms.

1. God created the cosmos to be a temple for his glory.

- God created the universe for his own glory. The Lord, not the earth, nor mankind is at the center of the universe. His original mandate to the man and woman was to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen 1:28). That is, God’s original intent for the earth was that mankind would multiply and expand the garden “temple” to the ends of the earth (Gen 2:8ff).
- After man’s sin the corruption of the created order meant that the earth would never be the temple garden originally intended. Man would have to worship and relate to God through means of mediation. So the Lord had his people construct a tabernacle (and later a temple) that was a representation of the cosmos in part to remind the people that the entire created order was the arena for the Lord’s praise.

2. God created humanity to give Him glory through worship.

- The arc of history is one of worship. Genesis begins with man in perfect communion with his Creator. But sin corrupted this and drove a wedge between God and man. God's answer was to redeem his rebellious people through the dying and rising of his only begotten Son (Jn 3:16). And now we wait for the age to come described so beautifully by John in Revelation 21 where the vast company of the redeemed will gather around the throne of the Lamb to worship once again in unhindered fellowship.
- The fall changed the way that men and women could relate to God. Whereas in paradise the man and woman walked with God in intimate fellowship, sin placed a gulf between man and his Maker. And so it is no surprise that by the time they are removed from the garden, Adam and Eve's sons cannot relate to God directly but only through means of a mediator. In this case we see them relating to God through the means of sacrificial offerings.
- This pattern will be given more definition following the Exodus where Israel's sacrificial rituals will be codified into law. A significant percentage of the first five books of the Bible is dedicated to God's instructions concerning how the people are to worship and relate to Him. The fourth chapter of the Genesis shows us what happens when a sinful man distorts worship. But the closing chapters of the Bible provide a vision for what worship will be in the age to come.

3. God alone determines the acceptability of our worship.

- It is true that whether we eat or drink or whatever we do we must do all to the glory of God. Whether we are working or playing, laboring or resting, in season and out of season we are to do all things to the glory of God. Yet when we come to worship God, and confess our sins, and seek his blessing, then he has prescribed the way we are to do this. We don't come to him in the holy place bringing our talents and our merits. Sin is mixed with every attainment and skill of ours. Therefore we must worship God through the means that he has prescribed.

How the offerings of Cain and Abel differed:

a) There was a difference in the quality of their offerings.

- Only Abel's offering was described in commendable ways. He brought the first and best. Cain's offerings are not described in this way suggesting that his offerings lacked the generous and sacrificial qualities of Abel's offerings.
- 2 Samuel 24:24 – "I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God that cost me nothing."

b) There was a difference in the quality of their hearts.

- There is a direct connection between the acceptability of our worship and the obedience of our lives (Prov 15:8, 26). Abel believed in God, that is, he trusted him and didn't lean on his own understanding. In all his ways he acknowledged God. Abel came to God in faith but Cain didn't. We know this in part from how the writer of Hebrews sets Abel apart from Cain: "By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings" (11:4). We also see the condition of Cain's heart in his jealousy toward Abel and anger against God. Even after God exhorts Cain to turn away from his sin, he hardens his heart all the more.

4. Let us go to God on His terms.

- Ultimately not even the good offerings of Abel could atone for sins. Our only hope in approaching God worthily is through the blood of Jesus.
- Hebrews 10:1-18