

# Worship Rules?

## *True Worship:*

Leviticus 10:1-3

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“I thought you had fallen off the planet”? Have you heard that expression? We know better. The law of gravity prevents us from falling anywhere but down. The center of gravity is near the planet’s core, so we even fall down into holes on the planet’s surface. We do so not because the law of gravity was passed in a legislature. We fall down because it is the nature of our world. We can argue with this law and jump off a cliff, but we’ll just illustrate it. If there are laws like this in our physical world, could there be spiritual rules that result from the nature of God, including worship rules?

We’ve been discussing over five Sundays what constitutes true worship. We’ve asked, “*Does God need worship?*” We’ve discover that it is we who need *to worship*. We noted that *God actually seeks worshipers* who respond to what he has done and embrace his presence. We asked, “*Is it worship if it stops?*” We found that true worship is like true love. You cannot turn it on and off. We asked, “*What do you do in worship?*” We discovered that forms of worship, like songs, prayers, offerings, and so on, are no more than nicely decorated, empty gifts, unless they truly express our hearts or are offered in response to God’s word. Today, we look at worship rules that result from the nature of God.

At the end of the book of Exodus, Moses and the Israelites construct a tabernacle exactly as God specifies. When they finish, a cloud settles on it. When the cloud lifts, they pack up the tabernacle and move wherever the cloud leads them. As the book of Leviticus begins, God gives

detailed instructions on offering sacrifices and preparing people for priesthood. In Leviticus 8 Aaron and his sons are ordained as prescribed. In Leviticus 9 and 10 we observe the first worship experience directed by God. The newly ordained priests do everything prescribed.

Then we read:

***Fire blazed forth from the Lord's presence and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When the people saw all this, they shouted with joy and fell face down on the ground.*** (Leviticus 9:24, NLT)

It is an amazing scene. It's an awesome and holy moment. What happens next, however, is so unexpected. The Bible says that Aaron's sons offered unauthorized fire.

It is important to understand that people did not have matches and lighter fluid. Fire was not easy to start. It was preserved in piles of burning coals. Two of Aaron's sons took burning coals from a nearby supply rather than the prescribed altar. They put them in censers or incense burners and sprinkled incense over the burning coals. Then they walked into the tabernacle with fragrant smoke pouring out. They never came out. The fire of mercy became a fire of judgment. Why? The Bible's language is clear. They ignored God's word. All that they had done up until then, the instructions they carefully followed, revealed that a holy God was allowing an unholy people to approach. The presence of a holy God means judgment for an unholy people unless they approach God in a way in which He can show them favor. We can fashion God into some image with which we are comfortable; and that is the history of humanity. However, if we are to connect with the true God and enjoy his favor, we must receive him as he is.

King David discovered exactly that when he brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem and ignored the word of God. In his parade of worship, described in 2 Samuel 6 and 1 Chronicles 13, a good man died. When later he carefully followed the words of Scripture, David and the people enjoyed great favor. The point of worship is honoring God as he is.

Twenty-eight years ago, I cracked up an ambulance. The next day the man with power to fire and hire showed up. He said that my ambulance partner was unavailable, and we'd be together. (I was not dumb. I had graduated from college 16 months earlier. I had an idea about what was happening.) Freezing rain began to fall. The streets and freeways of St. Paul became slippery. An emergency call came, and we had to go six miles along a busy freeway. I said to my boss, "You drive?" He answered, "No!" That is about the only word I heard from him. The silence was unnerving. Having just cracked up an ambulance, I now had to drive in risky conditions. As we pulled onto Lafayette Freeway (US 52) in downtown St. Paul, I said, "It's so icy. I'm going to take this slow." He said nothing; and for the next several minutes, an unusual phenomenon unfolded. An ambulance hurrying to the scene of an emergency, red lights flashing and siren wailing, was passed by car after car. That was the last time my boss was my partner. That day his presence influenced my every decision. His opinion and approval were paramount. Only he determined my fitness in my work. It was his position and his authority. In the end, whatever I did would only illustrate his position and authority.

The God of the universe, the God of all creation, is holy. All love, wisdom and justice come from him. Whatever doesn't is not loving, wise or just. No matter what you think, if you defy gravity, you will eventually illustrate it. In the same way, our lives one way or another will illustrate that God is God. In his love, he calls to us that we might enjoy his favor. The rule of worship is that true worship honors God as he is rather than as we think he ought to be. A second rule is that God wants to be known by you; for as you come to know him, you change. You become holy, even as he is holy; for that is the power of his presence. It had Isaiah crying, "I'm a man of unclean lips." It put Peter on the ground before Jesus. It had the entire Jerusalem Church repenting as they buried Annais and Sapphira. It had Isaiah, Peter and that Jerusalem

Church rejoicing as well, for they found that this holy God truly loves them. This holy God truly loves you and me as well. Look to the cross of Jesus and worship God as he is!