

# How Must We Worship God?

A Sermon on Psalm 50

by

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## 1. Introduction

## 2. We Must Recognize God is the Righteous Judge of All the Earth (vv. 1-6).

*a. God, the Mighty Judge, makes His presence known (vv. 1-3).*

i. The psalm begins with a rather incredible display of God's power and authority, and it is designed to cause us to see God as He truly is: He is the righteous Judge of all the earth.

1. He is the Lord God Almighty who enters into His chambers as the Judge of all the earth (v. 1).

a. This Lord of glory has spoken—and what He has spoken is a summons to judgment.

b. He has summoned all the earth, from the rising of the sun to its setting, to be a character witness as he calls Israel to trial.

2. He is the radiating perfection of glory and beauty in and of Himself, shining forth from Zion (v. 2).

a. The anticipation here is building up to the reality that God, in all His glory and zeal, makes Himself known by simply radiating His presence and glory from the Holy mountain in Jerusalem.

b. From the tabernacle, the glory of God is spilling over every nook and cranny of creation, showing that when God desires to express His holiness in judgment—it is the purest and most complete expression of beauty.

ii. “May our God come and not keep silence; fire devours before Him, and it is very tempestuous around Him” (v. 3).

1. The very nature of this God who is the pure expression of justice is that He is a consuming fire.

a. The idea is that in the wake of God’s holiness and His utter hatred of sin, the very presence of God cuts to the heart of mankind in his natural state.

b. It expresses itself in wrath—a perfectly contained storm of God’s fury that swirls about Him and levels everything in its path.

2. The foreboding feeling of the calm before the storm is what we sense in v. 3—and yet, it is not that this God is a terror to the psalmist. He is in awe.

a. In one sense, you should be filled with a very real sense of fear.

b. In another sense though—this judgment is good—and there’s no other way to describe it.

*b. God calls heaven and earth as witnesses to His righteous judgment on His people (vv. 4-6).*

i. “He summons the heavens above, and the earth, to judge His people: Gather My godly ones to Me, those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice. And the heavens declare His righteousness, for God Himself is Judge” (vv. 4-6).

1. Now the focus of who stands as witnesses to God’s judgment will be broadened to include all of heaven and earth. Even the angels are called in to stand in confirmation of God’s verdict.

2. Notice though the object of those whom He will judge: His own people, whom He calls His “godly ones,” will be the ones who stand on trial.

- a. The reality emphatically proclaimed by Asaph is that all of creation will stand and witness God’s perfectly righteous judgment—and confirm that it is good.
  - b. The reason why is quite simple: God is the Judge and He sets the standard for what is right.
- ii. We must see God as the perfect embodiment of justice and righteousness, and therefore, to worship Him properly, we must then conform to Him.
- 1. Where you and I immediately go wrong is that we create a false standard of righteousness and justice.
  - 2. This is the same problem that the psalmist identifies here; nothing in all of Creation will dispute the charges laid out by God because He’s the Judge.
    - a. In other words: they failed to honor God because they failed to see Him as the One who judges all things.
    - b. All of this is because they failed to see that God Himself is the complete perfection of what it means to be righteous.
    - c. In every instance in which we sin, we reflect what we truly believe about God.
    - d. At the foundation of improper worship of God is a false understanding of who He is.

### **3. We Must Acknowledge Our Total Dependence on God (vv. 7-15).**

- a. *God reveals they have falsely assumed He needed them (vv. 7-13).*
  - i. “Hear, O My people, and I will speak; O Israel, I will testify against you; I am God, your God. I do not reprove you for your sacrifices, and your burnt offerings are continually before Me” (vv. 7-8).

1. The Lord begins with a command for them to hear—and the intent is not merely that they will hear, but that they will give an answer for their sin.
    - a. In the midst of this, He reminds them they are yet His people and He is their God—but this is specifically set in light of their covenant obligations.
    - b. The content of His rebuke will be for a violation of the covenant, but notice first, He makes it plain they are not being rebuked for their offerings and sacrifices.
  2. They have dutifully come before Him to the letter of the Law with their sacrifices and offerings.
    - a. There is no hint of them bringing the wrong kind of sacrifice, nor that the priests were doing so improperly.
    - b. Externally, they would appear to have done everything correctly—so the question remains: what is the actual problem?
- ii. “I shall take no young bull out of your house nor male goats out of your folds. For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird of the mountains, and everything that moves in the field is Mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is Mine, and all it contains. Shall I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of male goats?” (vv. 9-13).
1. In essence, the Lord rebukes them for making the right sacrifices for the wrong reasons. There are a series of things about their sacrifices that give us a clue to what those reasons are.
    - a. For one, the Lord declares that every animal they bring to Him is already in His possession. He makes this painfully clear in v. 12 when He says, “The world is Mine and all it contains.” But it is worse than this.

- b. The Lord rebukes them in vv. 12-13 because they've come to offer God sacrifices, believing that these offerings would actually feed Him.
  - 2. At the heart of this rebuke is that they've come before God to make offerings to Him like you would any other pagan god.
    - a. We will see this theme come up again in v. 21—but I want you to understand just how offensive this truly is to God.
    - b. Any other pagan deity, no matter how you stretch it, is a reflection of man. But God is not like man. He is not in need.
- b. *God reveals it is they who actually need Him (vv. 14-15).*
- i. "Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving and pay your vows to the Most High; call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor me" (vv. 14-15).
    - 1. When we look at these two verses, all that God is indicating here is that we must come before Him with a recognition of our dependence on Him.
      - a. The sacrifice God speaks of here is what the Law called a "thank offering."
      - b. When they would honor their vows, the same issue of thankfulness is in mind.
    - 2. Then in v. 15, the cycle of praise continues: they must call upon the Lord in their time of need, He in turn will deliver them, and they would in turn offer Him more praise.
      - a. In every aspect, the point God is making is that their offerings, their vows, and even their praise, were all a reflection of God's continued work of grace in their lives.

- b. Their proper response to God was not that they could come before Him with anything but thanks. That's at the heart of true, biblical worship.
- ii. In all of it, God was calling them to enjoy the benefits of being His people and living in light of the covenant that He had made with them.
  - 1. The point of this being that if they came to God as if their offerings and sacrifices were fulfilling His need rather than their own, they, in essence, rejected God and His grace.
  - 2. They were the ones dependent on Him for everything, and every sacrifice they were to make was with this singular goal of thanksgiving and praise in mind.
    - a. The same is true for you and I. When we participate in the Christian life, we are simply enjoying the benefits of God's grace to us.
    - b. Every bit of the Christian life and proper worship then is to be done out of a reflection of God's grace.

#### **4. We Must Live With Complete Devotion to God and His Word (vv. 16-22).**

##### *a. God reveals their love is misplaced (vv. 16-20).*

- i. The first reason they are being charged with hypocrisy is that they despise God's Word (vv. 16-17).
  - 1. "But to the wicked, God says, 'What right have you to tell of My statutes and to take My covenant in your mouth? For you hate discipline, and you cast My words behind you'" (vv. 16-17).
    - a. These are a people who claim to be children of God and members of the covenant—but they lead a double-life, and God sees right past the charade.

- b. He knows their hearts are far from Him and that while they may come with sacrifices in plenty—they are like the Pharisees whom Jesus rejected.
  - 2. It is ultimately a rejection of the Word of God that they are guilty of.
    - a. When sin is revealed, they do not embrace the Lord’s discipline and turn back in repentance and faith—they revile God for it.
    - b. And the result is quite clear: a hatred of God’s Word inevitably leads to a life that is filled with all forms of evil.
- ii. The second reason they are being charged with hypocrisy is that they despise God’s ways (vv. 18-20).
  - 1. “When you see a thief, you are pleased with him, and you associate with adulterers. You let your mouth loose in evil and your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother’s son” (vv. 18-20).
    - a. The people that Asaph has in mind here are participants in corporate worship.
    - b. They are guilty of delighting in evil, crafting elaborate lies, slandering their brother, and more.
  - 2. These three verses can ultimately be summed up with the first and second greatest commandments.
    - a. They do the same thing that Paul speaks of in Romans 1 and 2.
    - b. Any time you and I seek after sin—especially when we know its sin—the reality is that we have rejected God and His Word.

- c. A mere conviction of sin will never be enough—we must always be moving forward on the path of repentance and faith.
- d. The sad reality though is that just like the Israelites, we presume.

b. *God reveals they have presumed upon His silence (vv. 21-22).*

i. “These things you have done and I kept silence; you thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you and state the case in order before your eyes” (v. 21).

1. The implication here is that they had somehow convinced themselves that God was not angry with their sin because He hadn’t confronted them about it.

a. What they ultimately did was confuse God’s patience with God’s permission, and so they kept on sinning.

b. They believed their sins, their worship, their thoughts of God—everything—was appropriate to bring before Him in worship.

2. The ultimate problem is that they did not align their lives, their worship, and their love around who God revealed Himself to be, and what He required of them.

a. They rejected God’s Word, they rejected God’s ways, and they presumed all the while that God didn’t care all that much about their full-fledged hypocrisy, but they were wrong.

b. God is very much concerned that we worship Him properly. He desires worshippers—but not just any worship will do.

ii. “Now consider this, you who forget God, or I will tear you in pieces, and there will be none to deliver” (v. 22).

1. This verse is fairly straightforward, as it is the harshest form of rebuke that can be delivered.



2. The promise here is a fierce judgment if they fail to repent. Nothing will bring salvation and hope for those who forget God.
  - a. What is meant by “forgetting God” is not that they have literally forgotten Him, but rather, that they have neglected to put into practice what they already know of God.
  - b. In other words, when you live without any reference to God and His Word, you live as functional pagans, who do not know God, and the result is judgment.

**5. Conclusion: We Must Persevere on the Path of Salvation With An Undivided Focus (v. 23).**

*a. God reveals He delights in true worship (v. 23).*

- i. “He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me; and to him who orders his way aright I shall show the salvation of God” (v. 23).
  1. First, the Israelites are called to remember who God is and what He has done, and then turn their hearts in proper praise to Him.
  2. Secondly, they must order their way aright.
    - a. What is meant by this is that the path any man is on must reflect the path that God has laid out for him.
    - b. He must fix his course so that he does not turn to the left or to the right—but have a singular focus and determination to persevere on that path of salvation.
- ii. The New Testament speaks to this same reality in multiple areas, but I want to draw your attention to just two.
  1. The first is when Christ commanded His disciples (and us) to, “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction,

and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matt. 7:13-14).

- a. The Greek word for “narrow” here does not simply imply that it is fewer who take this road, but that it is the more difficult road to take. But it is the only way that ends in life.
- b. The Christian life—or the life of proper worship—is indeed the narrow road. It will demand everything of you, but those who remain on this road will see the salvation of the Lord.

2. The second text I want to briefly mention is one from the apostle Paul, as he sits in prison, waiting to die.

- a. “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.”
- b. He has come to the end of his course and proven faithful to the very end—and what awaits him is the salvation of the Lord. And that is ultimately your duty and mine.

- b. All throughout this psalm, the charge to you and I is to order our lives in proper worship of God.
  - i. Everything ultimately comes down to worship—and everything we do is a reflection of what, or who, we worship.
  - ii. If you find you are guilty of offering up improper worship to God, whether you are a believer or an unbeliever, the remedy to you both is the same:

1. Recognize who God is. He is the righteous Judge of all the earth, and there will be none who can open their mouth in complaint against His judgments.
2. Secondly, recognize who you are in light of who God is. You are the one who needs Him, and it will never be the other way around.
3. Thirdly, recognize what God has declared in His Word is true, and whether or not you believe it, you are still required to obey it. But you must also come to love it, for no half-hearted obedience will do.
4. Finally, recognize that the path of salvation is indeed a path we must follow all of our lives.

### **Small Group Questions**

1. How does seeing God as the righteous Judge of all the earth inform your worship?
2. Out of the four characteristics of genuine worship, which area(s) do you find yourself consistently struggling to obey? Why?
3. Are these characteristics of worship evident in every aspect of your life? In other words: do you see that all of life is an act of worship, and if so, how is this evidenced to others?