

The **Bible** Unpacked

Comprehensive Study Series

The Bible's teaching presented
for Bible students

Paul Mallison

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for Bible students

27. Worshiping God

Paul Mallison

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A Quick Word

This series of studies aims to present a compilation of the Bible's teachings in a clear and readable order. There are 40 booklets in the series, based on the 40 chapters of the book *The Bible Unpacked - Comprehensive Edition*. Each booklet has two sections, which can be used for two or more studies.

See *Topics in This Series* towards the end of this booklet for a full listing of all the topics. Note that studying booklets alternatively from the two major sections (*What to Know* and *What to Do*) would add variety.

The material contains Bible verses. Before the verses are headings, which reflect what the verses say – in particular the parts of the verses in *italics*. The verses are sometimes followed by a comment.

The verses often have a brief introduction. Usually these state who is speaking and often who they are speaking to. Apart from God and Jesus Christ, the main speakers are:

- Moses – who led the Israelites and taught them God's laws;
- David – Israel's greatest king who wrote many of the psalms, most of which are essentially prayers;
- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and other prophets – who spoke to the people of Israel on God's behalf; and
- Paul, Peter, John and other leaders of the early church – who spoke to various groups and wrote letters to believers.

Much care has been taken in order to correctly interpret the verses. Nevertheless, if you encounter a verse that is used to teach something that is contrary to or goes beyond your understanding, assess its use by doing such things as: reading the passage it is from; and considering how its teaching fits in with Scripture as a whole (e.g. interpret OT teaching in the light of NT teaching).

For more information on *The Bible Unpacked* and free downloads, go to the website: www.thebibleunpacked.net.

Suggestions for Study Groups

Preliminary matters:

- Beforehand the leader should: check the context of any verses they are not familiar with; and review the questions. If need be, they should compose questions more applicable to the group.
- Each person should have a Bible, for things such as checking a verse's context. It would also be helpful to have Bible commentaries on hand.
- Pray before beginning the study. Ask God for help in understanding the meaning of the verses and to affect your lives through them. Also pray together at the end.

Doing the study:

- Ideally, read the material and answer the questions prior to the meeting. Then share answers and discuss any issues arising from the material in the meeting.
- Alternatively, read the material and answer the questions in the meeting – reading either aloud as a group or individually (prior to sharing answers). If reading as a group, **try having one person read the headings, another read the verses and another read the comments.** Additionally, a fourth person could read the Bible references.

General or concluding questions:

If time permits, conclude with one or more of the following questions:

- What is something that you either: **did not know** before; gained **greater insight** into; or **needed reminding** of?
- What verse would be helpful to memorize and bear in mind during the next week?
- In taking the verses seriously, is there anything you should change in:
 - (a) how you relate to God and/or to other people; or
 - (b) any other area of your life (e.g. attitudes, values or behavior)?

If so, are there any specific steps you could take to do this?

I. General

See also:

- *25. Exalting God*
- *28. Serving God*

Worshiping God is one of the most important and fundamental duties of believers. It involves honoring him by acknowledging his worthiness, including his divine characteristics and wondrous deeds. This is done through such things as praise and thanksgiving, offered with adoration and reverence.

It is also done through offering our resources and even ourselves to God. The former is born out in the second half of this chapter. The latter is done largely through serving God. As such the following chapter on serving God is also pertinent to worshiping him.

a) Worship God

We must worship God

Ps 29:2 Honor the wonderful name of the LORD, and *worship the LORD most holy and glorious.* CEV

Worship God alone – do not worship anything or anyone else

MATT 4:8–10 Again, the devil took him [Jesus] to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their grandeur. ⁹And he said to him, “I will give you all these things if you throw yourself to the ground and worship me.” ¹⁰Then Jesus said to him, “Go away, Satan! For it is written: ‘You are to worship the Lord your God and serve only him.’” NET

DAN 3:28 Then Nebuchadnezzar said, “Praise the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Their God has sent his angel and saved his servants from the fire! These three men trusted their God and refused to obey my command. *They were willing to die rather than serve or worship any god other than their own.* NCV™

Worship God for his glory and sovereignty

Ps 96:6–10A *Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. ⁷Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength! ⁸Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts! ⁹Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth! ¹⁰Say among the nations, “The LORD reigns!”* ESV

“Ascribe” (cf. vv. 7, 8) means “attribute” or “impute”. Verse 9a appears to indicate that we should worship God being mindful of or in view of “all his holy splendor” (NLT).

Worship God for his marvelous deeds – including his creation of everything

Ps 86:9–10 All the nations, whom you created, *will come and worship you, O LORD. They will honor your name.* ¹⁰For you are great and do amazing things. You alone are God. NET

REV 14:7 He [an angel] declared in a loud voice: “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has arrived, and *worship the one who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water!*” NET

Worship God because of his care of his people

EX 4:31B *They bowed down and worshiped the Lord because they knew that he had seen their suffering and was going to help them.* CEV

Explain in your own words what it means to worship God, including what it involves doing.

Why should we worship God? (Do not limit your answer to just what is mentioned in the verses.)

In regard to God, worshiping and serving are sometimes mentioned together. Do you see a connection between them? If so, what?

b) Worshiping before God

Worship before God, in his presence

1SAM 1:19A They rose early in the morning and *worshipped before the LORD*; then they went back to their house at Ramah. ESV

Like the Israelites in the OT were to worship before God at the tabernacle and later the temple – which signified his presence amongst them – believers are to worship before God, being conscious of his presence. But they are not restricted as to where they can do so.

Worship God in spirit and by the Holy Spirit

JOHN 4:23–24 But a time is coming – and now is here – when the *true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth*, for the Father seeks such people to be his worshipers. ²⁴*God is spirit, and the people who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.* NET

PHIL 3:3A [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] It is we, not they, who have received the true circumcision, for *we worship God by means of his Spirit* and rejoice in our life in union with Christ Jesus. GNT

To worship “in spirit” (cf. John 4:23–24 ↑) is primarily an inward activity, rather than being centered on the performing of rituals (which was such a prominent part of OT worship). It involves one’s spirit – and thus one’s mind and will. To begin with, the heart and/or conscience of the worshiper must be right before God. Then one must be honest and open in approaching God, and fully focused on God; obviously this needs to be done willingly. Not least, the worshiper must worship by the Holy Spirit (cf. Phil 3:3 ↑). This involves being conscious of the Spirit, relying on the Spirit’s enablement to commune with God and being open to the Spirit’s promptings.

Worship God in reverence and awe . . .

HEB 12:28–29 Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus *let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe*, ²⁹*for our God is a consuming fire.*

The description of God as a “consuming fire” points to his power and preparedness to fierily devour or destroy that which is opposed to him and incompatible with his holiness.

. . . Even bow down before God

Ps 95:6 [A CALL TO FELLOW ISRAELITES:] *Come! Let’s bow down and worship! Let’s kneel before the LORD, our creator!* NET

The Hebrew for “bow down” can be translated as “worship”, indicative of the fact that bowing down before God signifies and accompanies worship of him. Bowing and falling down (cf. Rev 11:16 below) before God are also signs of submission and humility – and indicate reverence of him. As such they signify reverent worship of God.

Worship God with praise . . .

GEN 24:26–27A Then the man knelt down and *worshipped the LORD*.²⁷ *He said, “Praise the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has faithfully kept his promise to my master.* GNT

HEB 13:15 [THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] Through him [Christ] then *let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God*, that is, the fruit of our lips, acknowledging his name. NET

. . . and worship God with thanksgiving

REV 11:16–17 [JOHN, DESCRIBING A VISION OF A SCENE IN HEAVEN:] Then the twenty-four elders who are seated on their thrones before God threw themselves down with their faces to the ground and *worshipped God*¹⁷ *with these words: “We give you thanks, Lord God, the All-Powerful, the one who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and begun to reign.* NET

Worship God through prayer and even with fasting

LUKE 2:37 She [Anna] had lived as a widow since then for eighty-four years. She never left the temple, *worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day.* NET

Worship is often done through prayer. Moreover, prayer itself is indicative of worship. Fasting is also used in worship, in part because

it sharpens our focus on God in worship and prayer. Additionally, it aids and signifies our earnestness and devotion to God.

What do you do to worship God?

What does it mean to worship God “in spirit and truth” (cf. John 4:23–24), and by the Holy Spirit (cf. Phil 3:3a)?

What do you make of the instruction to “tremble and worship the LORD” (Ps 96:9)? Should we tremble in worshipping God? If so, why?

Pray for persecuted Christians

c) Worshiping Together (I): General

Worship God together

NEH 8:6 Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people replied “Amen! Amen!” as they lifted their hands. *Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.* NET

Ps 95:6 *Come! Let’s bow down and worship! Let’s kneel before the LORD, our creator!* NET

Offer praise and thanksgiving together

EZRA 3:11 *They [Israelites] praised the LORD and gave thanks as they took turns singing: “The LORD is good! His faithful love for Israel will last forever.” Everyone started shouting and praising the LORD because work on the foundation of the temple had begun.* CEV

Pray together . . .

ACTS 1:14 *They [the apostles] gathered frequently to pray as a group, together with the women and with Mary the mother of Jesus and with his brothers.* GNT

. . . and repent together for corporate sin

NEH 9:1–3 On the twenty–fourth day of this same month *the Israelites assembled; they were fasting and wearing sackcloth, their heads covered with dust.* ²Those truly of Israelite descent separated from all the foreigners, standing and *confessing their sins and the iniquities of their ancestors.* ³For one–fourth of the day they stood in their place and read from the book of the law of the LORD their God, and for another fourth *they were confessing their sins and worshiping the LORD their God.* NET

When a group of God’s people fail him, it is appropriate that they repent together for such sin. Note that in a sense repentance is an aspect of our worship of God or is at least associated with it (v. 3). For repentance is a facet of our devotion to God, reflective of our reverence and adoration for him.

Offerings should be made during collective worship

1COR 16:2 [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH:] *On the first day of every week, each one of you should put aside money as you have been blessed. Save it up so you will not have to collect money after I come.*

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The reference to “the first day of every week” quite possibly has church meetings in view, for regular collections of offerings of such sums of money.

Have order and propriety in collective worship

1COR 14:40 [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH:] *But everything must be done in a proper and orderly way.* ISV

1TIM 2:8 [PAUL:] *So, I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up their hands in a holy manner, without anger and arguments.* NCV™

What aspects of your church’s worship times do you enjoy most? Is there any change that you would like to suggest?

What are the advantages of worshiping God together with other believers, as opposed to by yourself?

Why should repentance be done alongside worship (cf. Neh 9:3)?

Pray for persecuted Christians

d) **Worshipping Together (II): OT Feasts and Festivals**

See also:

- *Atonement was also made annually for all of the people, Ch. 9*
- *On the Sabbath God's people assemble for worship . . . , Ch. 29*

Although not observed by Christians, the feasts and festivals given in the OT law for the Israelites to participate in, exemplify the need for God's people to come together to worship God. Additionally, the reasons and regulations for the feasts and festivals contain principles that are relevant to the worship of God in all eras.

The Israelites were to celebrate together three annual festivals or feasts

DEUT 16:16A [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Booths.* ESV

The three annual festivals required all the people – or at least the men – to gather together. These festivals were: the Passover and The Feast of Unleavened Bread; the Feast of Weeks (also called Pentecost, in the NT); and the Feast of Booths. They were all linked with agricultural seasons, although the first was primarily rooted in God's deliverance from Egypt, the main focus of its celebration.

Celebration of God's deliverance: The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread

LEV 23:5–6 *The LORD's Passover is on the fourteenth day of the first month, beginning at twilight. ⁶The Feast of Unleavened Bread begins on the fifteenth day of the same month. You will eat bread made without yeast for seven days.* NCV™

The Feast of Unleavened Bread occurred during the month of Abib (March/April). It was preceded by the Passover. The Passover was observed in the evening, on the anniversary of the departure from Egypt. It commemorated God passing over the houses of the Israelites on the night he struck down the firstborn of Egypt, in attaining the release of the Israelites. The Feast of Unleavened Bread commenced the following day. The name of this feast is derived from

the requirement to eat bread made without yeast for seven days, as the Israelites did when they hurriedly prepared to leave Egypt.

Celebration of God's provision: The Feast of Weeks (or Pentecost); . . .

Ex 34:22 *Celebrate the Feast of Weeks when you gather the first grain of the wheat harvest.* NCV™

The Feast of Weeks was celebrated in the month of Sivan (May/June), fifty days after the Feast of Unleavened Bread. "Pentecost" – the Greek term for this feast – is derived from the number fifty. This feast marked the wheat harvest. It lasted only one day.

. . . and the Feast of Booths

DEUT 16:13 *You shall keep the Feast of Booths seven days, when you have gathered in the produce from your threshing floor and your winepress.* ESV

This festival was held in the month of Tishri (September/October), commencing five days after the Day of Atonement (cf. *Atonement was also made annually for all of the people*, Ch. 9) and lasting for seven days. It marked the fruit harvest, including the grapes. It also commemorated the wilderness wanderings, when the people lived in booths (i.e. temporary shelters) – and probably God's provision during that time.

Israel was also to celebrate new moon festivals

EZEK 46:3 *Each Sabbath and each New Moon Festival all the people are also to bow down and worship the LORD in front of the gate.* GNT

The feasts and festivals were celebrations and generally times of rejoicing

LEV 23:41A *You shall celebrate it [the Feast of Booths] as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year.* ESV

NUM 10:10 *“Also in the time when you rejoice, such as on your appointed festivals or at the beginnings of your months, you must blow with your trumpets over your burnt offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings, so that they may become a memorial for you before your God: I am the LORD your God.”* NET

They included sacred assemblies and days of no regular work

LEV 23:7–8 *On the first day there will be a holy assembly for you; you must not do any regular work.* ⁸*You must present a gift to the LORD for seven days, and the seventh day is a holy assembly; you must not do any regular work.* NET

The reference is to the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

What was the reason/s for Israel's annual feasts?

Is there anything your church could learn or imitate from the practices involved in the OT feasts and festivals?

What does it mean to "celebrate"? What can you celebrate in God's presence?

II. Offerings

Making offerings to God of money and/or goods is an integral part of worshiping God. Moreover, the Bible gives a number of good reasons to give offerings to God. It also gives guidelines on what to give and how to give to God. Additionally, the Bible emphasizes the need for our lives to please God in order for our offerings to be acceptable to him.

Note that this section contains many OT verses speaking of offerings required by the OT law. Some kinds of OT offerings, or sacrifices, were specifically for sin (cf. *Offerings for Atonement for Sinners*, Ch. 9). These have no current application for Christians as Jesus Christ sacrificed himself for sin once and for all. In contrast, other types of offerings were given for reasons such as thanksgiving to God and for the service of God. These offerings have their parallels in Christian worship offerings today – in the giving of money (and other resources) to God. Moreover, many of the OT regulations concerning these offerings provide reasons for and important principles involved in giving to God that are applicable today.

a) Reasons to Give to God

We are required to give offerings to God

Ps 96:8 Praise the LORD's glorious name; *bring an offering and come into his Temple.* GNT

EZEK 20:40B [GOD, SPEAKING OF/TO THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL:] There I will accept them, and *there I will require your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your sacred offerings.* ESV

Offerings are an important part of worshiping God

ISA 19:21 And the LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians, and the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day and *worship with sacrifice and offering*, and they will make vows to the LORD and perform them. ESV

Offerings acknowledge God's provision for us . . .

DEUT 16:9–10 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] You must count seven weeks; you must begin to count them *from the time you begin to harvest the standing grain.* ¹⁰*Then you are to celebrate the Festival of Weeks before the LORD your God with the voluntary offering that you will bring, in proportion to how he has blessed you.* NET

The people were to bring an offering of an amount that was in proportion to the size of the harvest that God had blessed them with. Today believers likewise offer a portion of what they have earned from their work.

. . . In fact, all we have to give God has been given to us by him and ultimately belongs to him

1CHR 29:14, 16 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *But who am I and who are my people, that we should be in a position to contribute this much? Indeed, everything comes from you, and we have simply given back to you what is yours. . . .* ¹⁶*O LORD our God, all this wealth, which we have collected to build a temple for you to honor your holy name, comes from you; it all belongs to you.* NET

Offerings express thanksgiving to God for his deliverance

Ps 56:12–13 [DAVID:] O God, I have taken vows before you; therefore *I will offer thanksgiving sacrifices to you.* ¹³*For you have delivered me from death and my feet from stumbling, so that I may walk before God in the light of the living!* ISV

Offerings support the service of God . . .

Ex 35:29 *The Israelites brought a freewill offering to the LORD, every man and woman whose heart was willing to bring materials for all the work that the LORD through Moses had commanded them to do.* NET

. . . Offerings are often to help the needy – bringing thanks and praise to God

2COR 9:12–13 [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS:] *What you are doing is much more than a service that supplies God's people with what they need. It is something that will make many others thank God.* ¹³*The way in which you have proved yourselves by this service will bring honor and praise to God. You believed the message about Christ, and you obeyed it by sharing generously with God's people and with everyone else.* CEV

The Corinthians' "service" was giving towards the needs of the poor believers in Jerusalem, as referred to in the latter part of v. 13. Such giving is effectively making offerings to God.

By giving to God, we ourselves will be blessed

LUKE 6:38 *Give, and it will be given to you: A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be poured into your lap. For the measure you use will be the measure you receive.* NET

PHIL 4:18–19 [PAUL, TO THE PHILIPPIAN BELIEVERS:] For I have received everything, and I have plenty. I have all I need because I received from Epaphroditus *what you sent – a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, very pleasing to God.* ¹⁹*And my God will supply your every need according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.* NET

Note: God has given us the ultimate gift – Jesus Christ himself

JOHN 3:16 For this is the way God loved the world: *He gave his one and only Son*, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. NET

2COR 9:14–15 [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS:] And in their prayers on your behalf they long for you because of *the extraordinary grace God has shown to you*. ¹⁵*Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!*

NET

Verse 14 speaks of the Corinthians' generosity as being a manifestation of God's extraordinary grace. By its insertion immediately following this, v. 15 suggests that God's "indescribable gift" of his Son is a reason and motivating factor for Christians to give to God, in accordance with and in appreciation of his incredible gift to them.

Why is making an offering to God considered to be an act of worship?
In what sense is it worshiping God?

Which of the reasons for giving to God do you find most motivating?
Why?

What are some ways that God has blessed you? How do you or how should you respond to this?

Pray for persecuted Christians

b) What to Give to God

Give the “firstfruits” to God

2CHR 31:5 As soon as the command was spread abroad, the people of Israel *gave in abundance the firstfruits of grain, wine, oil, honey, and of all the produce of the field.* ESV

The OT speaks of giving to God the first portion of what we produce, often referred to as the “firstfruits”. Today many believers emulate this by giving to God a portion of their wage on first receiving it. This acknowledges God’s provision and goodness in a way that honors him (cf. Prov 3:9) – putting him first, rather than simply offering him the leftovers that we can spare. Note also that offering the firstfruits to God was a statement, made in faith, that the rest of the harvest would take place – a principle also applicable today.

Give the best to God . . .

EX 23:19A [A DIRECTIVE TO THE ISRAELITES:] *You must bring the best of the firstfruits of your land to the Holy Tent of the LORD your God.* NCV™

. . . Do not give what is inferior to God

LEV 22:20–21 [DIRECTIVES TO THE ISRAELITES:] *You shall not offer anything that has a blemish, for it will not be acceptable for you. ²¹And when anyone offers a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering from the herd or from the flock, to be accepted it must be perfect; there shall be no blemish in it.* ESV

Give all that you can

2COR 8:2–3A [PAUL, SPEAKING OF THE MACEDONIAN CHURCHES:] *They have been tested by great troubles, and they are very poor. But they gave much because of their great joy. ³I can tell you that they gave as much as they were able and even more than they could afford.* NCV™

MARK 12:41–44 Then he [Jesus] sat down opposite the offering box, and watched the crowd putting coins into it. Many rich people were throwing in large amounts. ⁴²And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, worth less than a penny. ⁴³He called his disciples and said to them, “I tell you the truth, this poor widow has

put more into the offering box than all the others. ⁴⁴For they all gave out of their wealth. But *she, out of her poverty, put in what she had to live on, everything she had.*" NET

It would appear that Jesus is speaking of the widow's action as being exemplary.

The practice of giving an amount in proportion to one's income – such as a tenth

1COR 16:2 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Every Sunday each of you must *put aside some money, in proportion to what you have earned*, and save it up, so that there will be no need to collect money when I come. GNT

DEUT 14:22 [A DIRECTIVE TO THE ISRAELITES:] *Set aside a tithe—a tenth of all that your fields produce each year.* GNT

How is the command/principle of giving the "firstfruits" to God (cf. 2Chr 31:5) applicable to you?

How is Mark 12:41-44 applicable to us?

What costly changes could you make to your lifestyle, to enable yourself to give more?

Pray for persecuted Christians

c) How to Give to God

Give in a way that is acceptable to God . . .

LEV 19:5 [A DIRECTIVE TO THE ISRAELITES:] *When you sacrifice a fellowship offering to the LORD, offer it in such a way that will be accepted.* NCV™

. . . This includes giving willingly

2COR 9:7 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *Each one of you should give just as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, because God loves a cheerful giver.* NET

Give joyfully

1CHR 29:17B [DAVID, TO GOD:] *In the uprightness of my heart I have freely offered all these things, and now I have seen your people, who are present here, offering freely and joyously to you.* ESV

Note that the first part of the verse speaks of making offerings with sincerity and honest intent.

Give generously

2COR 9:5–6 [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS:] *Therefore I thought it necessary to urge these brothers to go to you in advance and to arrange ahead of time the generous contribution you had promised, so this may be ready as a generous gift and not as something you feel forced to do. ⁶My point is this: The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows generously will also reap generously.* NET

Note that in v. 5 Paul is speaking of a gift towards the support of needy believers.

Give regularly . . .

1COR 16:2 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *On the first day of the week, each of you should set aside some income and save it to the extent that God has blessed you, so that a collection will not have to be made when I come.* NET

This verse is quite probably speaking of money being brought to Christian gatherings held on the first day of every week.

. . . and give on special occasions

NUM 29:39 [A DIRECTIVE TO THE ISRAELITES:] *“At your festivals you should bring these to the LORD: your burnt offerings, grain offerings, drink offerings and fellowship offerings. These are in addition to other promised offerings and special gifts you want to give to the LORD.”*

NCV™

1KI 8:63 *Solomon offered as peace offerings to the LORD 22,000 cattle and 120,000 sheep. Then the king and all the Israelites dedicated the LORD’s temple.* NET

Note: The practice of making of vows to God, which have to be kept

DEUT 23:21–23 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *When you make a vow to the LORD your God, don’t delay paying it, because the LORD your God will certainly demand payment from you, and then you will be guilty of sin.* ²²But if you refrain from making a vow, then you won’t be guilty. ²³Be sure you do whatever you promise, because you have given your word voluntarily to the LORD your God. ISV

Vows are voluntary promises made to God, usually as an act of worship, expressing devotion or thanksgiving. Regarding thanksgiving, vows may be made either in response to something one has received or as a promise to God if he would grant a request. A vow usually involves offering something to God, but can instead involve doing something or abstaining from something. The practice is not compulsory and is rarely mentioned in the NT.

Why is it important to give to God willingly?

What evidence or reason/s do you know of to support the truth of 2 Corinthians 9:6?

Is there any change you should make in how you give to God?

Pray for persecuted Christians

d) Righteousness and Making Offerings

We must live righteously to acceptably worship God . . .

AMOS 5:7, 21, 23–24 [GOD:] *You, Israel, turn justice into poison and throw righteousness on the ground. ... ²¹I hate your festivals; I despise them. I'm not pleased with your religious assemblies. ... ²³Spare me the sound of your songs. I won't listen to the music of your harps. ²⁴But let justice flow like a river and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.* GW

MAL 3:3–4 He [the Messiah] will sit refining and purifying silver, purifying the children of Levi, refining them like gold and silver. *Then they'll bring an offering in righteousness to the LORD. ⁴Then the offering to the LORD by Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable as it was in the past, even as in former years.* ISV

. . . Our offerings are not acceptable to God if our lives do not please him

JER 6:19B–20 [GOD, SPEAKING OF HIS UNFAITHFUL PEOPLE:] *For they have paid no attention to what I have said, and they have rejected my law. ²⁰I take no delight when they offer up to me frankincense that comes from Sheba or sweet-smelling cane imported from a faraway land. I cannot accept the burnt offerings they bring me. I get no pleasure from the sacrifices they offer to me.* NET

Moreover, God desires righteousness more than offerings and sacrifices

MARK 12:33 *And to love him [God] with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your strength and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.* NET

1SAM 15:22 But Samuel answered [King Saul], *“What pleases the LORD more: burnt offerings and sacrifices or obedience to his voice? It is better to obey than to sacrifice. It is better to listen to God than to offer the fat of sheep.* NCV™

We should in fact offer ourselves to God, in service to him, . . .

ROM 12:1 [PAUL:] So then, my brothers and sisters, because of God’s great mercy to us I appeal to you: *offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him.* GNT

. . . and offer other spiritual sacrifices to God

1PET 2:5A [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] You also are like living stones, so let yourselves be used to build a spiritual temple—to be holy priests who *offer spiritual sacrifices to God.* NCV™

HEB 13:15 Through him then *let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, acknowledging his name.*

NET

Why does God desire righteousness more than offerings?

To what extent is your life a “living sacrifice” (Rom 12:1)? How could you make it more so?

What spiritual sacrifices can we offer to God? In doing these things, would you find it helpful or encouraging to think of such things as sacrifices? If so, why?

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Through prayer, encouragement and practical assistance we can assist and fellowship with persecuted Christians in their suffering. You can play a vital part in this through contacting one of the organizations listed below. Most produce regular news/prayer letters.

Barnabas Fund – www.barnabasfund.org

It provides material and spiritual support based on locally identified needs.

Christian Faith and Freedom – www.cffreedom.org

It advocates on behalf of and aids persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity International – www.csi-int.org

CSI works to defend religious liberty and help persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide – www.csw.org.uk

It advocates for freedom of religion and justice for persecuted believers.

Open Doors – sb.od.org; www.opendoors.org.au

It equips believers for persecution and maintaining a witness to the Gospel.

Religious Liberty Commission – www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc

RLC defends and aids persecuted Christians. See also www.idop.org.

Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin – rlprayerbulletin.blogspot.com.au

It provides weekly bulletins. Send a blank email to join-rlpb@hub.xc.org.

The Bible League – www.bibleleague.org/persecuted; www.bibleleague.com

It supplies Bibles to persecuted Christians and also provides training.

Voice of the Martyrs – www.persecution.com; www.persecution.com.au

VOM helps persecuted Christians spread the gospel. It also gives material aid.

World Watch Monitor – www.worldwatchmonitor.org

It reports the story of Christians under pressure for their faith.

Then the King will answer, 'I tell you the truth, anything you did for even the least of my people here, you also did for me.' Matthew 25:40 NCV

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