

What is Acceptable?

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[0:00] Ephesians 5 from verse 8 Proving what is the acceptable unto the Lord.

What is acceptable to our Lord and what is not? Some things are light, some things are darkness. And I was talking with a brother lately and sometimes it seems like there's shades of grey but reeling with God is one or the other, darkness or light.

And we've got to consider what is acceptable unto the Lord. Is it light or is it darkness? What is the truth? Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.

And that should dictate everything that we do. What we participate in, what we fellowship with, is it darkness or is it light? And in the verse here we're told of the fruit of the Spirit.

The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth. And on the other side we've got the unfruitful works of darkness which we're told we should have no fellowship with but rather we should reprove them, we should speak against them.

[1:39] And so we all need to consider what is it that we're participating in? What is it that we're fellowshiping in? Is it darkness or light? One or the other. Darkness or light? That's the question.

It's one or the other. And is it acceptable unto the Lord or not acceptable to Him? And as believers our desire is truly to do what is pleasing unto Him.

That's what we must do. What is pleasing unto Him. It says in the word in Romans 8 verse 8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. It's either the flesh or the Spirit.

It's either darkness or light. And we need to discern the two. It's interesting, even for men of God's truth history, they've realised truth and error. They've realised the two.

They've discerned the two. It's interesting that Spurgeon himself, Charles Spurgeon, he broke from the Baptist Union. He'd once been formerly an active part of it. And he wrote of the Baptist Union.

[2:36] He says, With deep regret we abstain from assembling with those whom we dearly love and heartily respect, since it would involve us in a confederacy with those with whom we can have no communion in the Lord.

He realised the darkness and light of the time that he was in. And another statement is, Fellowship with known and vital error is participation in sin.

And I know through life we can learn things of darkness and light, things we might have formerly thought was truth, we might be more discerning about as time goes by.

And the question is for all of us, Is it acceptable unto the Lord? That's what counts. Not unto men, not unto the popular crowd, but what is acceptable unto the Lord?

What is acceptable unto him? And some things are counted in the word as not acceptable unto him. For example, we could think of back in Genesis, back in the very start of time, where we had Cain and Abel in their giving.

[3:42] Both of them gave. Both of them gave something. One gave something that was not acceptable unto the Lord. Cain brought the fruit of the field, and Abel brought the firstlings of his flock.

What Cain brought was acceptable in Cain's eyes, but it was not acceptable in the Lord's eyes. It was not accepted because it was his own works.

It was his own doings. It was the manufacture of his own hands. Whereas Abel brought that which was the firstborn, the best of his flock. It was what God had provided, and he sacrificed that, which couldn't be regrown.

It was the sacrifice of blood. And we know, as it speaks to us, of Calvary, doesn't it? We see in Cain and Abel, it was Cain's giving, was of his own works, of his own doing, of the works of his own hands.

Whereas Abel, it was the blood. And it speaks to us of Calvary. And the condition of the heart made Cain's sacrifice not acceptable unto the Lord.

[4:50] Another example of unacceptable giving, Ananias and Sapphira. They gave generously. You know, they sold property, and they gave, no doubt, a reasonable sum.

It was a generous gift. But yet, it was not acceptable unto the Lord, because they'd been deceptive and lied to God in that which they had done. It was suddenly second rate.

It was not wholehearted that they gave. And we look back in the Old Testament, we know when the people tried to give a sacrifice, it was described as not acceptable when it had a blemish.

For example, Leviticus 22, verse 20. So our giving can sometimes not be acceptable. Now, sometimes we know the word says, it urges us to give cheerfully, not out of compulsion.

You know, you might give what seems the right thing to give, but if you're giving it out of compulsion, out of a sense of being begrudging and being pressured and forced into giving, then it's not the right kind of giving anyway, as much as it might seem to be.

[5:56] It's the attitude behind the giving that is the ultimate and absolute thing. Our giving can be unacceptable. Our worship can be unacceptable. We see that in the Word of God, where some, through the Old Testament times, they offered strange fire before the Lord.

It was unacceptable fire. It was self-generated fire. It wasn't fire that was on the altar, but it was a manufactured, man-made kind of fire that wasn't His will for them.

And it was not acceptable unto the Lord. Interesting, isn't it, that they were worshipping the right God in the right place, but they were worshipping wrongfully, wrongly.

And it was not acceptable unto the Lord. And there's many well-meaning people worshipping wrongly. As we know, the Word urges us that we should worship Him in spirit and in truth.

The two go hand in hand. And God speaks to some whose worship He does not accept. For example, in Jeremiah 6, verse 20. And the context here is of those disobeying His Word.

[7:02] The people spoken of here, in Jeremiah 6, verse 20, it says, To what purpose cometh there to me incense from Sheba and the sweet cane from a far country? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices sweet unto me.

Interesting, isn't it? They were bringing burnt offerings, sacrifices, but they were not acceptable. And the question was, for what purpose? And some of the question, I know, speaking to some of late, just for example, on one issue alone.

The question about rock music. Rock music. The question could be asked, can rock music be used to worship God? Some would think, yes, that it can. But the insightful question I was challenged with was, what is the purpose of the thing?

What is the purpose of rock music? And, friends, we wouldn't have to think too hard to consider what is the purpose of rock music? And it's contrary, it's counter, it's darkness and light.

It's contrary to that which our worship should be, which is to worship the Lord, to honour Him. We wouldn't use something that was purposed to bring carnality and fleshliness and sensuality.

[8:21] Our music's purpose is altogether a different one from that which rock music is designed to be. A different purpose.

You can think back, another example of wrong kind of worship, of worship that is not acceptable, we see in David's day. David, a man after God's own heart. The king, a godly man, a large part of the time at least.

And David had 30,000 chosen men with him. He had the popular opinion of his day. It was something if they put to the popular vote, they'd have voted in, no doubt, as something that was appropriate.

The new card was used. David used a new card to carry the Ark of the Covenant, that symbol of God's glory.

of his presence with the people. David, I could conjecture, he might have ornately carved it and beautified it and painted it and you can imagine he wouldn't have spared any cost to the Ark, to the cart that would bear the Ark of the Covenant.

[9:35] You could imagine he would have applied had it been the latest technology of his day to make this Ark that carried, sorry, this cart

that carried the Ark to be a very appealing thing and an appropriate thing in his mind.

But no matter how appealing to him, no matter how popular to the people, no matter whether it makes sense even to the flesh, to the natural mind of a man, the cart was not God's will. The cart was not acceptable unto the Lord because God had ordered that it was the Levites that would carry the Ark of the Covenant upon their shoulders. That was what was acceptable unto the Lord to obey his word.

And instead of obeying God's direction, the Levites allowed, not that it be carried on their shoulders, but that it be carried in a manufactured, man-made vessel again.

It was a man-made means. He disobeyed God and the worship was not acceptable to the Lord. Now sometimes, people tonight, God sometimes hates going to church, as it were, you know, in the sense of the modern sense of it.

[10:47] In Amos 5.21, he says, I hate, I despise your feast days and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them.

Here they were, a feast day, a solemn assembly, a holy occasion, a holy giving of offerings, of sacrifice, and yet God says, I hate it, I despise it.

The incense, the picture of their prayers, he says, take away from me the noise of thy vials, the noise of thy songs, the melody of thy vials, you know, the musical instruments of the day.

God was displeased with their worship. In the context of Amos 5, the context is, these people were kind of having a foot in both camps because they were still compromising with idols.

They were making all these songs and ceremonies, but in the context of Amos 5, they were not wholly devoted to the Lord. They were compromising with the enemy.

[11:54] The Lord Jesus, he says about vain worship, unacceptable worship, to the Pharisees, he says, but in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

Now we can, all of us, be guilty at times, I know, speaking for myself, we can go through the motions and miss the real substance of what God truly wants, miss what God really wants of us and of our lives.

To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice. We need to consider our heart. What is acceptable unto the Lord? We've talked about unacceptable giving, unacceptable worship, unacceptable prayer now.

Think of the tax collector and the Pharisee. The two of them went up to the temple in Luke 18. We're told that the Lord spoke to those who trusted in themselves, that they were righteous and despised others.

In Luke 18, from verse 10, two men went up into the temple to pray. The one a Pharisee, the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are extortioners, unjust, adulterers or even as this publican.

[13:12] I fast twice in the week. I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

And the Lord Jesus says, I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other, for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. Acceptable prayer. An unacceptable prayer. If we come to God praying within ourselves, thinking we're so good, and looking at others as less than us, our Lord says it's not acceptable worship. It's not acceptable prayer. Now, friends, we've been talking about the negative. Let's move on to the positive side now. Talk about that which is not acceptable to him. The good news is that you can be accepted.

You can be accepted. And what we do can be acceptable unto him. For example, our giving, our worship, our prayer, our service, it can be acceptable unto him.

[14:26] Why? Because Christ has made us accepted in the beloved. We read that in Ephesians 1.6, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

Accepted. Friends, today, you are accepted in the beloved, in Christ, in his love, in his act of love of Calvary's cross. You can be accepted.

You can have the doors swung wide open and a reception with God Almighty. It starts with faith because it says, without faith it is impossible, impossible, to please him.

Hebrews 11.6, but he that cometh to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Faith makes it possible for us to please God. Isn't that great? That in all the mess and confusion and distraction and the things of the world and the things of vain religion, of unacceptable worship, of unacceptable prayer, that there is a place for you to be accepted in Christ's arms, in Christ's embrace, in Christ's welcome and you can trust him through faith.

[15:45] It is possible to please God. Without faith it is impossible to please him. So friends, tonight, if you haven't had that starting point of faith, your prayer is vain, your worship is vain, your service is vain, but faith, faith, that spark, that ignition point of faith that he creates and a heart receptive to him.

That faith makes pleasing him possible. We read in Romans 14 what God puts a priority on. In Romans 14, 17 it says, for the kingdom of God is not in meat and drink, talking about judging of people of different tangible things, but he says, but this is what the kingdom of God is in, righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God and approved of man. That's how we can be acceptable of God. Righteousness, peace, joy in God's Holy Spirit.

Our prayer can be acceptable. We read in 172 of the context there of Paul urging Timothy, he exhorts him to pray, to make supplication for men, for all men, for kings, for those in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty, for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour.

Your prayers can be accepted. Amen. Your prayers can be heard. Your prayers can be received.

It's a good and acceptable thing. Acts 10, 35 it says, in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him.

[17:36] There's a couple of things there. He that fears him and he that works righteousness is accepted with him. Do we truly fear him? Do we fear God?

It's not a trepidation, a fearfulness of our own feeling, but it's a sense of who he is, isn't it?

It's that awe, that wonder, that respect, that love that he creates in our heart. We realise how small we are, how finite we are, how infinite he is.

It's that fear of God, that working of righteousness, that pleasing him, that wanting to please him.

And when we become a Christian, our aim should be his pleasure. His pleasure should be our aim.

It should be our focus. It should be that which we are zealous about. We read in Romans 12, 1, I beseech you therefore, brethren, that familiar one, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

[18:39] It's that surrender of our will, of our heart, our body, that it be holy, acceptable unto him. We can surrender our life to him, our lifestyle to him.

Our giving can be good. It says in Hebrews 13, 16, but to do good and communicate or share or give, forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

God can be pleased with our giving. God can be pleased with our serving. Hebrews 12, 28, it talks about let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear for our God is a consuming fire.

Again, there's an encouragement for you, for me, that there is a place to serve. There is a way that we can serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. Again, think of it.

Do we carelessly come to serve him? Do we flippantly come to pray? Do we come in our own strength, in our own fleshiness to serve him? Or do we come with reverence and godly fear?

[19:45] That is acceptable service. Psalm 147, 11, it says, the Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him. The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.

So, especially tonight, I'd encourage you to think of fearing God, fearing him, having a love for him that comes from your realisation of our smallness and of his greatness.

For example, in Jeremiah 9, 23, along the same theme, a lovely verse, a couple of verses there, in Jeremiah 9, verses 23 and 24, a very wonderful verse that you might like to put to memory.

It says, Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise men glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty glory in his might.

Let not the rich men glory in his riches, but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise with loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.

[21:06] So don't delight, don't rejoice, don't glory in your wisdom, if you might be wise, don't glory in the letters after your name, though that's a credit to you, but it's nothing that we can glory in, in comparison with the glory that we can give to God.

Don't glory in your riches, if you're rich, don't glory in your might, if you considered mighty, but glory in this, that you understand and know the Lord.

That's the ultimate, that's the absolute, that's the foundation of life worth living, isn't it? To know him, to know him, whom to know is life eternal.

And there's many scriptures, I've really just picked them all over the place, I know it's a bit hopscotch tonight, but there's many verses that encourage us to serve him acceptably, with reverence and godly fear.

It tells us that we are a spiritual house, in 1 Peter 2 5, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable, acceptable again, to God by Jesus Christ.

[22:16] And maybe for you, in your life, you might think as a Christian, it's not always been rosy, it's not always been easy, especially for some in other lands, they might especially apply 1 Peter 2 verse 20, it says, for what glory is it when you're buffeted, when you're suffering for your foals, you shall take it patiently, but when you do well and suffer for it, you take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.

Now as a Christian, I know for myself, there's been times when I stood up for the Lord, and I've been knocked down by worldly friends or associates or colleagues at work and what not, that when we sometimes make a stand for Christ, we sometimes suffer for it.

But then it says, if you take it patiently, in other words, you persevere and go through that with God's grace, this is acceptable with God.

It's something that God counts as acceptable to Him. Now friends, just one scripture to close, it says in Philippians 2 12, wherefore my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, Paul writes, work out your own salvation again, that's that word again, with fear, with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

God works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. The twofold thing, His good pleasure, what is acceptable to Him. We started with that verse that said, proving what is that good and acceptable, what is acceptable unto the Lord.

[24:05] As Romans 12 says, proving what is that good and acceptable will of God. And friends, tonight, are we doing that which is acceptable unto Him?

And I know, really, for every decision of life, for every moment of life, we all ought to consider that. Oughtn't we? We ought to consider that. Really, it all boils down to that. Maybe through this week ahead, think about, is what I'm doing acceptable unto Him? Or is it a work of the flesh?

Is it a work of my own? Is it something that is not pleasing to Him? and work out your salvation with fear and trembling? I love to tell the story of haunting things of God.