

# **GOD IS NO LIGHTWEIGHT**

LEVITICUS 9:1-24

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# God Is No Lightweight

## Leviticus 9:1-24

As I have been studying through the book of Leviticus, I have become more and more convinced that most of us who preach on a regular basis have been preaching a defective Gospel. I grew up in the 60's. Our society has been clearly moving to make religion more like another form of self-help. We have been taught that we should not feel guilt or shame. We should not talk about fearing God; we should talk about loving God. We have made Christianity palatable. In other words, we have tried to turn Christianity into something that can help make us feel better. And above all, we should never be legalistic in any way. We should make people feel better about themselves. I know that I have fallen into that trap. Over the years, I have watered down the message of Christianity. I think I often present Christianity as a way people can feel better and cope with life's problems.

Those may in some way be by-products of being a Christian, but they are certainly not to be the focus. The message of Leviticus and the entire Bible is that God is holy, righteous, just, and perfect. He demands that we be holy as well. The bad news from the beginning is that we can never be holy on our own. The good news is that God has always provided a way in which we could be in a right relationship with Him. As we study through Leviticus, we see that God provided sacrifices and rituals. Those sacrifices and rituals all pointed to the ultimate sacrifice: the humiliation, the suffering, and the death of Jesus. God has provided Jesus as our sacrifice. We can now only be right with God by placing our faith and trust in Jesus.

We must keep in mind that God sees all, knows all and judges all. I used to hang around with some very cynical and sarcastic guys in college and seminary. At the cafeteria, the staff was always uptight about everything. One day, at the front of the cafeteria line, a bowl of apples had a sign on it. The sign said, "Take only one please, God is watching."

At the end of the line, in front of the cookies, one of my friends had placed this sign, "Take all the cookies you want, God is busy watching the apples."

Our society, and even more sadly our churches have lost a sense of how powerful and how dangerous God is.

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The famous preacher and early president of Princeton University, Jonathan Edwards, preached a famous sermon called, "Sinners in the hands of an angry God." In the sermon, he pictured us as hanging by thread over the burning fires of hell. His message was that because of our natural bent toward evil, our personal rebellion, our self-centered and self-absorbed lifestyle, we find ourselves in our natural state as enemies of God.

Only by acknowledging our true state, repenting, asking forgiveness of our sins, and by placing our faith in the finished work of Christ can we be reconciled to God. There was no talk of feeling better. The talk was about our utter sinfulness and God's perfect holiness. That sermon could not be preached and well received today. John Newton's famous song "Amazing Grace" starts out with the sentence, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me." I have been in pastoral meetings where pastors actually cringed and argued against that theology. They argued that we should never think of ourselves as wretches. Modern day Christianity has become impotent because we have rendered God as impotent. We have come to view God as an indulgent Grandparent Who exists to make us feel better and fulfill our wish lists. The reason modern day Western expressions of Christianity are defective, impotent, and false is the main idea of this morning's text. **WE HAVE**

**LOST THE SENSE OF GOD'S HOLINESS.** Please don't ever fall into this false sense of security by thinking that God is some sort of jovial, indulgent grandparent who accepts everything we do. That false theology leads to death because in fact the God we worship is dangerous. The authentic Judeo-Christian response to God is one of reverent, fearful, loving and loyal service. We have come to call this worship.

## **I. THE THEOLOGY OF WORSHIP (VS 1-6)**

### ***God's Blessings Are New Every Morning.***

Verses 1-6 lay out the theology of worship. In this section we will learn that **GOD'S BLESSINGS ARE NEW EVERY MORNING.** That indeed is good news. God's blessings and mercies are new and fresh every day. But as we will see, there is only one way to access God and that is to simply trust Him and obey Him. There is no other way.

#### **A. Command (1-4)**

In verses 1-4, through Moses, God gives Israel the command to worship. Again, let me say this one more time; these are not suggestions or guidelines, they are commands. And as we have already seen there are specific ways in which these rituals are to be carried out. The reason is that God has chosen to live in the center of the Israelite camp. Since God is perfect and holy, it would be dangerous for the people. God has made this way for them to be safe in His presence.

Look at verse one. This time, Moses will not be acting as the priest like he did in the last chapter. In today's text, Aaron will take his place as high priest and his sons will take up their positions of priests. Keep in mind that Moses ordained Aaron and his sons to the priesthood by anointing them in several different ways and also offered up various sacrifices on their behalf. They were also commanded to stay in the worship area for 7 days.

We pick up the action now on the eighth day. Let's think about this for a moment. This is now the first day of a new week. In other words, a new era has begun. This era will carry Israel for the next 1500 years when the temple is finally destroyed in 70 AD. What else is significant about the eighth day is that Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the new week after Passover. That is why Christians worship on Sunday. With Jesus' resurrection comes a new era of worship. No longer do we approach God through the blood of animals, we now enter into God presence through the blood of Jesus Christ. God is still holy. He is still perfect. He is still dangerous. But we remain safe in His presence because of the finished work of Jesus on the cross. Jesus is now the eternal High Priest Who continues to make constant intercession on our behalf.

Aaron, his sons, and the nation of Israel are told to gather up the proper sacrifices for sin and burnt offerings, along with grain and oil, and they are all to report to the worship area. They are to come prepared to meet God in person. You see, I think because of our defective preaching and bad theology, we do not take these types of passages seriously. They had all experienced the thunder, lightning, fire and darkness when Moses went up Mt. Sinai to get the Law. They were frightened so much that they told Moses to go up on their behalf. They wanted nothing to do with that type of experience. Now, on this eighth day, they are all summoned to meet God. They had no idea if they would live to see the end of the day. This first day of a new era could be the last day they lived on this earth.

We have no concept of that type of a living and powerful God. The Bible often talks about one of the proper ways in which to approach God is fear. But we don't like to think about that so we often soften the word fear to reverence or respect. Listen when the Bible says we are to fear God, that's exactly what it means. The fear described in the Bible is to be "shake in your boots, pee your pants" fear.

## **B. Response (5)**

And because of that, there is only one proper response described in verse 5. There was no discussion or brainstorming or committees formed. Look how abrupt verse 5 is. It is staccato. They gathered up the things Moses commanded. The priests and the nation assembled themselves in front of the worship tent. But also note that it doesn't say they came to church or went to the temple, or even the worship tent. They came near and stood before Jehovah. I realize that God is everywhere. But do you think our attitudes would be different if instead of saying, "We are going to church today," we would say, "We are going to stand before God this morning."? Perhaps we would be a little more fearful, quiet, reverent, and serious when we entered the sanctuary if we understood we were presenting ourselves before God as individuals and as a community.

Look Christianity is not a religion. It is a relationship with a living, holy, personal, passionate, and dangerous God. The only way to be in a right relationship with God is to humbly trust Him and obey Him. We have got to stop making up ideas of who God is and what He tolerates. The command to us is to be holy. The only appropriate response is to obey. Perhaps the reason we have trouble conquering sin is because we don't take God seriously. John Sammis wrote in a hymn, "Trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey." Let me take this opportunity to also correct our misconceptions about obedience. Obedience does not mean we simply do the things that we want. True obedience involves a true and painful breaking of our will. Listen to this astonishing statement about Jesus found in the book of Hebrews:

*"<sup>7</sup> During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. <sup>8</sup> Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered <sup>9</sup> and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him <sup>10</sup> and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 5:7-10 / NIV).*

Jesus, who was God in the flesh, had to learn the meaning of obedience through suffering. If He had to learn obedience through suffering, then why would we assume it has to be any easier for us? The breaking of our egos, wills, and pride is painful. But that is exactly what God expects.

## **C. Promise (6)**

Verse 6 describes a promise that God gave to the Israelites through Moses. But what I want us to see is that the bridge between God's commands and God's promises is our obedience. The promise here is that God will reveal His glory to His people. We should stop here to describe what the word glory is. Glory is one of those words religious people throw around every day. We all use the word as if we know what it means, but if someone were to ask us what it meant, we probably couldn't define it. In Hebrew, the word is *kabod*. Literally, it means to be heavy and weighty. In Greek the word for glory is *doxa*. It means reputation. In referring to God's glory, we are talking about His presence, majesty, power, and reputation.

When we talk about God's heaviness, we are saying that His presence is so powerful that it is overwhelming. I don't think we have enough hyperbolic language to describe God. If you think about how big our earth is, how big our solar system is, and how big our universe is, and think that God created it all and inhabits it all, our minds cannot even begin to understand how big and powerful God is. This should cause us to fall to our knees in fear to think that in our natural states, we are God's enemies. How could we stand up and even try to defend ourselves? If not for God's grace and mercy, we would be totally crushed under His presence. On the other hand, when we are in a right relationship with God, there is nothing that can stand against us. The Apostle Paul wrote in one of his letters, "If God is for us, who could possibly stand against us?"

God has made this same incredible promise to us. God has further promised to manifest His glory in us. That means that the way we live our lives directly reflects on God's reputation. When we think about this promise of God manifesting His glory in and through us, let us be both excited and afraid. I think the author of Hebrews summarizes it nicely:

*<sup>19</sup> And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. <sup>20</sup> This is the new, life-giving way that Christ has opened up for us through the sacred curtain, by means of his death for us.*

*<sup>21</sup> And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's people, <sup>22</sup> let us go right into the presence of God, with true hearts fully trusting him. For our evil consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.*

*<sup>23</sup> Without wavering, let us hold tightly to the hope we say we have, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. <sup>24</sup> Think of ways to encourage one another to outbursts of love and good deeds. <sup>25</sup> And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near" (Hebrews 10:19-25 / NLT).*

Indeed **GOD'S BLESSINGS ARE NEW EVERY MORNING**. God has promised us so many things. He has promised to complete the good work He started in each one of us. He has promised to never leave us nor forsake us. He has promised to make us and mold us into the image and nature of Jesus. But in order to access these promises, we must die to our self-centered, self-absorbed, and selfish attitudes. We must obey His commands to be humble to be pure, and to submit to His timing and His methods.

## **II. THE ORDER OF WORSHIP (VS 7-21)**

### ***There Is A Proper Way To Approach God.***

Continuing on with the idea of submission and obedience, the proper order of worship is laid out in verses 7-21. In other words, **THERE IS A PROPER WAY TO APPROACH GOD**. Again, we are not allowed to make up our own rules for living. We have already studied through the sacrifices described here. If you are unclear what they all mean, please feel free to go back and read about them in the previous sermons on Leviticus. They are all posted on our church website.

#### **A. God Is Holy (7)**

The first step in worship is to acknowledge that God is holy and this is conveyed in verse 7. As we study through this section, I would like for us to pay attention to the

order of the sacrifices. One of the tools we use in teaching people to pray is the Acronym "ACTS." **A** stands for adoration, **C** stands for confession, **T** stands for thanksgiving, and **S** stands for supplication. This really is a nice way to approach God.

In adoring Him, we focus on God's glory: His presence, His holiness, His power, His presence, and His love. The mistake most of us make in prayer is that we focus on our problems or our situation. In other words, these problems seem like mountains and they often obscure our view when trying to approach God. Our problems and situations seem to be insurmountable. However, if we put our problems and situations aside and focus first on God's greatness, our problems and petty situations seem small.

After adoration, and after focusing in on the holiness of God, our natural response should be to realize how sinful we are and how far short we fall from God's expectations for us. This leads us into confession because we know that when we ask for forgiveness, God will forgive us. When we realize what Jesus has done for us on the cross, we are naturally led to the next part of prayer that is thanksgiving. We are told to approach God with thanksgiving in our hearts. This is a time for us to reminisce about all the things God has given us and done for us throughout the years. This is a time for us to count our blessings.

I have found that when I follow these steps in prayer, I am always filled with joy and confidence as I approach the last stage of prayer, supplication. By the time I get to the part in my prayer where I bring these problems and situations to God, the problems and situations seem very small and insignificant. Many times, I don't even feel the need at this point to even ask for anything. When we try to look at God through our problems, our problems will seem like mountains. When we look at our problems from the perspective of how big and powerful God is, the problems look insignificant and easy to deal with.

So in verse 7 Moses is now focused on God. As Aaron and his sons offer up sin and burnt offering sacrifices on behalf of the people and themselves, they are focused on the fact that the One True and Living God, Jehovah, lives in their camp. He has demands of purity, faithfulness, holiness, and obedience. What they realize here is that God is perfect and holy; they are not.

## **B. Preparing the Worship Leaders (8-14)**

### **1. Purification (8-11)**

Let's now get to the actual worship. The first step in worship is to make sure the worship leaders are prepared to lead the congregation as described in verses 8-14. First of all, we are introduced to their purification in verses 8-11. The first sacrifice offered here is the Sin Offering. What is interesting is that Aaron, who is the High Priest, must first confess his sins and make atonement for them. As we said when studying through the Sin Offering, Confession and repentance are necessary steps in approaching God. It always amazes me when I talk to people who don't think they are sinners. I know many people, including some at our church who think they are pretty good and upright. I don't say anything, because I'm sure that people who think they are pretty good won't be able to hear the truth. But the fact is, we must approach God knowing how morally bankrupt we are. We must confess that and repent of that. Good worship leaders must themselves be right with God before leading others into worship.

This applies to all church leaders. Think of it this way. Let's picture ourselves as cars. Let's say the congregation is pictured as a car that is stuck in the mud. Let's say that the leaders are represented by another car. This car will try and help get

the other car out of the mud. Let's further say that the car that is supposed to help is also in the mud. So we hook up a chain from the leader's car to the congregation's car. When the leader's car tries to pull out the other car, it realizes that it has no traction. Its wheels start spinning and they come to realize they are stuck in the mud as well. If the leader's car is to pull out the congregation from the mud, they themselves must be on some good, hard, solid ground. Then when we hook up the chain, we will be able to pull the stuck car out of the mud. Leaders must be in a good relationship with God if we are to help others.

## **2. Dedication (12-14)**

The next sacrifice offered up by Aaron on behalf of himself is the Burnt Offering. We said that this signified the wholehearted dedication of the priest's life to God. This sacrifice is described in verses 12-14 as dedication.

To summarize this section we would say that those who would lead others into worship, discipleship, or any other ministry must first be right with God. Leaders must keep short sin accounts with God and must dedicate themselves to God's service every day and every night. Later on, we will learn that this Burnt Offering is to be offered up the first thing every morning and the last thing every night by the priests. It is a sign of total dedication to God. What is interesting is that as we have said before, God now considers all believers to be priests.

## **C. Community Worship (15-21)**

### **1. Repentance (15)**

And now the community worship is described in verses 15-21. Again, in verse 15 the Sin Offering is presented first for the people. We should always keep in mind that we are sinners and that we need constant cleansing and forgiveness for our sins. This would seem overwhelming except for the provision God has made for us through Jesus:

*"<sup>8</sup> If we say we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and refusing to accept the truth. <sup>9</sup> But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong" (1 John 1:8-9 / NLT).*

### **2. Dedication Ourselves (16)**

Next, just like for the priests, the next offering offered up is the Burnt Offering described in verse 16 as dedicating ourselves. Remember the burnt offering is totally burned up on the altar. Nothing is spared. The Apostle Paul reminded us that we are to be living sacrifices, wholly dedicated to God. This offering was meant to be a statement on the part of the worshipper that he or she was dedicating himself or herself to God wholeheartedly, holding nothing back. Again I don't think we have to do much thinking to realize that we have not really dedicated ourselves to God. All we need to do is look at our day planners and our credit card statements to see that we are not wholly dedicated to God.

### **3. Dedicating Our Best (17)**

That's not the worst of it though. Verse 17 reminds us that we are to dedicate our best. This grain offering had to do with offering the firstfruits. When we studied through this offering we said that first meant we offered to God the first in terms of His offering came first and first had to do with the best. We should offer our first and our best to God. I have taught some very bad theology over the years I have

been in ministry. I have always looked at the congregation as volunteers so when people have volunteered, no matter if they did a good job or a sloppy job, or a halfhearted job, I would thank them for their service reasoning that I'm thankful they volunteered. I have tried to avoid legalism and perfectionism. And so I have not demanded much from the people I have ministered to.

However, I have done you a great disservice. Most of us are very careful of how we perform our tasks at school or work. However, when we come to church, we offer whatever we have left in terms of time and energy. Let me go out on a limb here and assume that you guys are a lot like me. I put a great deal of effort in my work, in my studies, in my athletics, and in my entertainment. However, I often find myself being careless or halfhearted at the things I do for God. I'm trying to change little by little. I think I can share some of the things I do. I have my tithe taken out of my check before I even have a chance to spend the rest of the money. It is the first financial commitment I make. I used to just wait for a convenient time to do my devotions.

Now, before I start any work for the day, I do my devotions. These kinds of things in themselves don't really mean anything except for the fact that I am consciously trying to put God first in all areas of my life. These accomplishments are nothing for me to be proud about. I am supposed to be doing those things. When I am driving the speed limit, which is kind of rare, the policemen never pull me over and congratulate me for driving the speed limit. We are commanded to be holy. That means we are supposed to be totally dedicated to God. These types of sacrifice are also offered up on occasions of thanksgiving.

We have come to God adoring Him for Who He is. We have come to realize that we fall way short of God's holy standards and so we have confessed our sin. Then we have dedicated ourselves totally to God. We have dedicated everything we own and are. We dedicate our first and our best. In so doing these things we have given thanks to God for what He has done, for Who He is, and for how He has provided for us.

#### **4. Fellowship (18-21)**

The result is that we will enjoy fellowship with God and with one another. The last sacrifice described here is the Fellowship Offering described in verses 18-21. We said that another word for this offering was the Peace Offering or the Well Being Offering. If we want to experience the peace of God, then we need to learn to live life the way God designed it. We can never experience God's peace if we try to live with one foot in the world and the other in God's kingdom. We will always be anxious and fearful. The only way to experience God's peace is to conform our thoughts to God's thoughts as described in the Bible, then to conform our behavior to that of Jesus our Lord and Savior. The more we become like Jesus, the more we will experience peace.

Remember the ACTS prayer model. Let's dedicate ourselves to lifestyles characterized by adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication. Listen to how the Apostle Paul summarizes this:

*<sup>4</sup> Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.*

*<sup>6</sup> Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. <sup>7</sup> If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.*

<sup>8</sup> And now, dear brothers and sisters, let me say one more thing as I close this letter. Fix your thoughts on what is true and honorable and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. <sup>9</sup> Keep putting into practice all you learned from me and heard from me and saw me doing, and the God of peace will be with you" (Philippians 4:4-9 / NLT).

The upshot of this section is this. **THERE IS A PROPER WAY TO APPROACH GOD.** Let's dedicate ourselves from this morning to give God our first and our best.

### **III. THE OBJECT OF WORSHIP (VS 22-24)**

#### ***The God We Worship Is Powerful And Dangerous.***

This last section reminds us what Christianity is all about. Verses 22-24 describe the object of our worship. Let us never forget this. **THE GOD WE WORSHIP IS POWERFUL AND DANGEROUS.** Everything has been done. The sacrifices have been completed and now it is time for God to make His appearance.

#### **A. Our Preparation (22)**

In verse 22, our preparation is made complete. After all the sacrifices had been completed, the people had put themselves in a position to be blessed. Aaron now stepped down from the altar lifted his hands and blessed the people. Perhaps it was the blessing recorded in the book of Numbers:

<sup>24</sup> *The LORD bless you and keep you;*

<sup>25</sup> *the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;*

<sup>26</sup> *the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace*

*(Numbers 6:24-26 / NIV).*

#### **B. God's Arrival (23-24a)**

God's arrival is described in verse 23 thru the first half of verse 24. Moses and Aaron then went into the worship tent. Notice it is called the Tent of Meeting. This doesn't mean it is the tent where the congregation goes to after the worship service for coffee and doughnuts. It is called the Tent of Meeting because it is the place where God will meet His people. If we are looking for a description of what the glory of God is like, then this is a pretty good description. Let's put ourselves in the shoes of the congregation. I don't think I could stand to even imagine what it was like inside the tent. We are standing outside in the worship area where we have worshipped God and received our benediction. We watch Moses and Aaron go into the tent. Then all of a sudden this incredible flash of fire flies out of the tent, and consumes everything that was still burning on the altar. I'm sure I would not lift my hand, wave back and forth with a sweet smile on my face. I'm sure I would have been frightened out of my mind and fell to the ground. If I had time to recover there on the ground, I may become excited and filled with joy. I would be frightened to see such a display of shock and awe.

However, to then realize that the One behind this awesome display was on my side and that I was in a right relationship with Him, would fill me with peace, joy, and contentment. What else could I possibly want out of life? When God displayed this

type of glory when Solomon dedicated the temple, Solomon responds by saying of God, "He is good and His love endures forever."

Sometimes I don't think we understand the powerful descriptions of Jesus because most of us have very little understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures. Now after all we have studied here this morning and after all we have studied about the sacrificial system in Leviticus so far, let me read this passage to you from the first chapter of the Gospel of John:

*"<sup>14</sup> The Word became flesh and (set up His tent) made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, Who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. ...*

*<sup>16</sup> From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another" (John 1:14-16 / NIV).*

Jesus set up the Worship Tent among us. And listen to what one of those blessings was. Remember in the Leviticus passage, God has His Chosen People, Israel, gathered around Him.

Referring to those who have placed their faith in Jesus,

*"<sup>12</sup> Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—<sup>13</sup> children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:12-13 / NIV).*

### **C. Our Response (24b)**

When we think about all these things our response ought to be similar to the response in the second half of verse 24. All the people shouted with joy and fell facedown. Look I know people like to come to church to make themselves feel better by singing, crying, waving their hands and swaying back and forth. We clap and sing and say amen. But let us never forget the object of our worship. **THE GOD WE WORSHIP IS POWERFUL AND DANGEROUS.**

## **IV. EPILOGUE**

Many people who call themselves Christians never seem to find the peace, joy, and contentment they hunger for. The primary reason is that we often find ourselves worshipping an impotent god, who is not really the God of the Bible. This is really sad to say, but **WE HAVE LOST THE SENSE OF GOD'S HOLINESS.**

In Derek Tidball's commentary on Leviticus, he summarizes this thought by referring to a modern day church historian:

*"The contemporary ills of the church have, in part, been attributed to our lack of appreciation of the glory of God. With good reason, David Wells has raised a prophetic protest against the understanding of God held by many Christians today. It is, he says, 'weightless'. The transcendence of God has been diminished to the point where we now believe in a god who serves us, satisfies all our needs and therapeutically fulfils our every whim, rather than a God we must obey and 'before whom we must surrender our rights to ourselves'. God has been drained of glory, divested of majesty, and denuded of authority. The fundamental problem of the evangelical church, Wells asserts, is not inadequate technique, poor organization or irrelevant music, but 'that God rests too inconsequentially upon his church'. And until we restore weight to God,*

*nothing we do will 'staunch the flow of blood from [the church's] wounds'."*

Perhaps many of us are not experiencing the peace, joy, and contentment that God promises because we are not worshipping the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible is indescribably dangerous. But He is also powerful enough to accomplish all we can think or imagine ... And more! Let us humbly submit in obedience to the God of the Bible.