

# Study Guide



## Relationship Not Ritual

Psalm 50

### Main Idea

God wants a covenant relationship, not empty performance

### Overview

- 1) **God summons; God has authority: there is accountability in the universe.**
  - God is our Creator; he knows what is good for us, and wants what is best for us
  - The purpose of God's summons is for an appraisal, leading to judgment.
- 2) **God communicates: God does not keep silence**
  - God is engaged in what is happening on planet earth.
  - If God did not communicate, how would we know him?
  - Jesus Christ is God's ultimate, supreme self-revelation (Hebrews 1:1)
  - We know God through his Word.
- 3) **God surprises: he punctures our expectations**
  - God doesn't need the sacrifices, which had become empty rituals
  - We are not doing God a favour by our service or worship
  - Don't be misled into thinking that performance is sufficient.
- 4) **God demands more than rituals: he wants a covenant relationship of trust**
  - "Be thankful; fulfil your promises; depend on me, asking for help; responding with praise to my deliverance"
  - Other passages where God points to his real priorities, above sacrifices : 1 Samuel 15:22; Hosea 6:6; Amos 5:21-24
  - Christianity is not about keeping rules, it's about trusting your heavenly Father.
- 5) **God rebukes and warns those who reject him**
  - They recite God's laws, but in practice, they ignore them.
- 6) **God is (still) the unexpected one; he still surprises:**
  - He is patient, due to his mercy
  - They thought he was 'like them' – compromising and weak – they wanted a God to match
  - Dangerous: God is perfect and unchanging – a watered down God would be unable to save and not worth staking your life on
  - Even the wicked can escape punishment: "if you do what is right and give me glory and thanks, I will deliver you"; you get salvation; you get God.

### ***What does Psalm 50 tell us about God?***

- He is awe-inspiring; not to be re-defined into something more acceptable

- He is Judge, and will judge us
- He has taken the initiative to reveal himself and his requirements
- He sets the standards, not us
- He doesn't need us or our 'gifts', our 'service'
- He wants a genuine covenant relationship, not empty ritual:
  - a relationship of dependence, thanksgiving, obedience
  - an all or nothing commitment – what looks like reckless abandonment

***What does Psalm 50 tell us about us?***

- We are accountable
- We have messed up
- We tend to let our faith become routine, imagining that 'performance' will please God

***What then shall we do?***

- 1) Think ahead to God's final assessment
- 2) Make sure our faith and our actions are both real and connected
- 3) Ensure we are dealing with God as he really is, and not trying to reformulate our own 'version' that we would find more acceptable.

***Discussion questions:***

- 1) Why did God institute the Old Testament system of sacrifices? (Galatians 3:24; Hebrews 10:1-4)
- 2) How prone are you to the trap identified in Psalm 50, where 'ritual', 'routine' and 'performance' hollow out a genuine trusting relationship with God? Where does such a path end up? What are some ways we can counter this trend?
- 3) How can we take advantage of our tendency to fall into 'routines', and use it to help us in our Christian lives? (Hebrews 12:11-13)
- 4) What aspects of God's character do you find most appealing? Might this lead to a lop-sided vision of God? What are the risks in 're-imagining' God into something easier to cope with? How can we maintain an accurate understanding of God as he really is?
- 5) What kind of judgment will Christians face? (Revelation 20:11-12; II Corinthians 5:10; I Corinthians 3:10-15) How does this knowledge impact on our lives now?

*Accountability question:* Which of your 'routines' needs to be renovated or repaired this week?