

Worship 3 - Misconceptions

(Number three in a series of ten)

Psalm 42:1, 2 speaks to the fact that humans have an instinctive desire to worship. "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God..." Let us take special notice that the writer says he was seeking for the "...living God..." (v. 2). Surely, it is He whom each of us should seek to worship. Yet, we recognize many throughout the world worship gods that are manufactured by man, being deceived thereby.

Paul warns us concerning such deception in Colossians 2:8. "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." Recognizing the need to worship the one true and living God, we turn our minds to the worship that is to be offered. What kind of worship do you offer God? Is it the kind: 1) With which God is pleased? 2) For Which He asks? 3) That is acceptable to Him? Or does any of this matter? 1) Does He have a preference? 2) Does He ask for, or even demand, certain avenues of worship? 3) Are there efforts at worship that He rejects?

The answer, as to whether it matters or not, is clearly seen in the following few verses! The first is John 4:24-- "God {is} a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship {him} in spirit and in truth." This verse clearly teaches that if one is to worship God faithfully, he must have a proper attitude, and that attitude must be based on truth (John 17:17; II Timothy 2:15; 3:16, 17). [A failure to base every aspect of our worship on "truth", will result in vain worship!] The second is Matthew 7:21-23-- "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Please notice these important points from this text: 1) Not all who claim to follow and worship Christ are accepted of Him! 2) Therefore there is vain (profitless) worship. 3) Such worship is considered by Christ as "work of iniquity". 4) Those who offer such, regardless of sincerity, are not even "known" by Christ.

These inspired declarations clear things up very quickly for those who have studied them, and properly discerned. Yet, there are many who still have misconceptions concerning acceptable worship. It is to a discussion of three of these misconceptions that we now turn our attention.

ALL LIFE IS WORSHIP

There are those who, wanting to make worship more modern and appealing, declare that "all of life is worship". If this claim is true, one would not have to be concerned at all about any type of "formal" worship; he could simply follow his desires, wherever they might lead. Yet, a short study of God's word shows the error of this claim. Please seriously consider the following examples. Matthew 7:21-23, which we considered earlier, shows clearly that "all life is worship" is a false concept. If all of life is worship, why would their "... many wonderful works..." be rejected? Would it not be because they were "wonderful" only to those who were offering them; not to God! Remember, He did not even "recognize" them.

When Abraham, responding to God's directions, went to the land of Moriah to offer Isaac as a

burnt offering, he said to his young men, "...Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you" (Genesis 22:1-13). If all of life is worship, what would he mean by such a statement? There surely would not have been a need to go elsewhere to worship, since they would have been in the constant act of worship.

Philip approached a man from Ethiopia, as he rode in his chariot, and taught him of Christ (Acts 8:26-39). Where had this nobleman been? Jerusalem. Why had he gone there? To Worship God!

Surely, this Ethiopian did not believe all of life was worship, or else he surely would not have taken the long ride to Jerusalem. Philip, the inspired speaker, succeeded in teaching this man of Christ, and he obeyed the saving Gospel, being baptized for the remission of sins. Yet, nowhere did he even imply that all of life is worship! (What an opportunity he missed, if such were the case.)

Paul tarried seven days in Troas to be able to worship with the saints upon the first day of the week (Acts 20:6, 7). Surely, if all of life is worship, he would not have waited so long. Why then did he tarry? He tarried because he could not have worshiped with them, concerning all of the elements of worship, without doing so.

A little common sense reasoning is often what is needed. This is the case here. Considering the fact that God has never accepted the whims of man, is it not foolish to think the daily routines we encounter are worship? We ask, is one worshiping God when he takes a shower, or uses the rest room, etc.? Surely not! Yet this would be the case if all life is worship. Some advocates of this concept may declare, "that is not what we mean". Yet, these are some of the daily acts of life.

Therefore, if "all life is worship," these would have to be included!

_____ WORSHIP IS NOT REGULATED. _____

Another popular misconception concerning worship is that it is not regulated; which if accepted would open worship up to anyone's whim. This claim is a double first cousin to the one just discussed. As it's cousin, is a clear rejection of plain examples and commands.

Notice Ecclesiastes 12:13. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this {is} the whole {duty} of man." How can one keep God's commandments, concerning worship, if worship is not regulated? Surely we recognize one could not do so! The statements contradict one another. Consider the following: Aaron and the Israelites (Exodus 32:1-28). Moses had gone upon the mount to receive the law of God. While he was gone, the people had Aaron build a golden calf for them to worship. God, in response to their actions, called them "...stiffnecked people" (v. 9). They were then punished (v. 20), and had to declare allegiance to God (v. 26), since they had shown a lack of allegiance by their "false worship". The end result was that about three thousand men died that day because of their "unregulated" worship (v 28). Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1, 2)-- "And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord." Strange fire -- such a little thing to mans thinking. Yet, they were devoured by that fire, showing it wasn't a small thing to God! If they could now speak, would they agree that worship is not regulated?

Jeroboam "...devised of his own heart..." his own worship, in order to keep the people following him (I Kings 12:25-33). Was God pleased? His reaction gives the clear answer. He condemned his actions, and those who worshiped wrongly (I Kings 13).

Clearly, God does regulate worship, through His divine Word! He did during the Patriarchal

period (Genesis 4:3-7; Hebrews 11:4). He did during the Mosaic period (Exodus 32:1-28). He does during the Christian period (under which we are now living).

Through a study of the New Testament we learn the clear pattern for worship today; that which is acceptable to God. Any other we must reject, if we are to avoid the plight of those Matthew referred to.

_____PERFORMANCE WORSHIP._____

There are many who consider the worship just described as God's "regulated worship" as being "boring". To them, it doesn't "inspire". It does not hold their attention. The claim is thus made that, "If worship is not changed to a more exciting, up to date, activity, the church will lose her younger generations". Because of this thinking a push for "performance worship" is taking place. A recent example is that of, a wrecked car, with bloody bodies strewn around, being placed in the middle of a denominations "sanctuary". From what was said, I understood that this was a "worship" program.

It is recognized that there is nothing wrong with skits, in their proper places, and much good can be taught, and thus learned, in such situations. However, worship to God is not the appropriate time and place! When one begins to desire worship of this kind, he has forgotten the "object" of worship. Acceptable worship is a God-centered phenomenon. Jesus shows this to be the case, by

His response to Satan, when he tried to get Him to bow down before him. His response was, "...Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matthew 4:10). Acceptable worship involves, as we have previously pointed out, submission to certain prescribed acts. We are to pour out our souls in adoration of deity. So, when men, in their worship, seek to direct attention to themselves, instead of God, they seriously err. This is exactly what "performance worship" is doing! This is true whether it involves choirs, soloists, drama groups, or other like entertainment.

One's attitude is also important when worshiping. Christ declares that man is to "Take heed..." .

About what? "...that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 6:1). He illustrated this truth by mentioning several devotional items, e.g., the giving of alms, praying, and fasting. He then condemned the actions of some who put their worship on "display" so as to attract the attention of others; labeling them as "hypocrites" (Matthew 6:2, 5, 16).

When ones attitude is wrong, his motive(s) often becomes wrong. He loses sight of what pleases God. He begins looking inward, to what pleases himself. This is what had happened to those to whom Christ was speaking, and He was showing this to be the case. You see, Jesus knew they would be seen in their worship of Him. He had just instructed them to let their light shine before men, "...that they may see your good works...". However, the purpose was to "...glorify your Father which is in heaven" , not to bring glory to self (Matthew 5:16), which is what they were doing. To put the spotlight on pleasing ourselves is to fail in honoring God!

It is recognized that the claim of those that advocate "performance worship" is that such does give glory to God. This does not ring true however. To bring glory to God is to obey His will (John 14:15). "If ye love me, keep my commandments." As discussed earlier, His will is clear concerning our worship to Him! To void His will, for our own, in worship, or any other venue, in no way gives glory to God!

_____IN CONCLUSION_____

Throughout history, God has demanded "the best" from man, concerning worship! Blemished sacrifices were always rejected, along with the one making the offering (Exodus 12:5; Leviticus 22:20; Deuteronomy 15:21; 17:1). Those with blemishes could not approach God (Leviticus 21:17, 21).

This was even true of Jesus! He could not have blemishes, if He were to fulfill His purpose, and be pleasing to His Father. Indeed, he had no blemishes. Those of us who have obeyed Him have therefore been redeemed ...with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (I Peter 1:19).

It must also be of the church! Ephesians 5:25-27-- "...Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." Those who have rejected God's plan of worship, even if they have obeyed in other matters, will not be accepted, due to blemishes.

What pleases us does not necessarily please God! Recognizing this truth, let each of us honestly strive to do only that which pleases Him; in our worship, as well as in all other aspects of our lives.

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