

When Worship Is Wrong

Introduction

1. Worship is central to the life of a Christian and to the church, but not all worship is right or is pleasing to God.
2. It seems unthinkable and distasteful to our modern religious society to declare anyone's religion as wrong, let alone the act of worship itself, given the prevailing emphasis on pluralism, personal freedom, and mutual respect for diverse beliefs.
3. Reading through the Bible we see that there is a prevalence of worship; it begins with worship - that of Abel - and ends in worship - with the angels around the throne.
4. Throughout this continual thread of man worshipping God, there is absolutely no indication that God accepted unregulated or self-designed worship.
5. In fact, there are clear instances of God's displeasure and judgment against those who assumed they could worship Him in their own way or as they pleased

I. When Worship is Wrong

A. The Bible is replete with examples of occasions when man worshipped God but it was rejected as wrong:

1. The Golden Calf – Exodus 32:7-8 (Read)

- a. In a time when every Israelite should have been focused on the majesty and power of the one True God they retreated to the pagan they had learned about - and probably indulged in the worship of - in Egypt.
- b. As they stood at the foot of Mount Sinai they would have seen for themselves the stark contrast between the powerless religion of Egypt to power as they witnessed to the rolling of the thunder and lightening as God came down in a cloud.
- c. Instead the people erected a golden calf and bowed down to false god to represent God himself (Exodus 32:7-8).
- e. Through their worship God declared that the people had corrupted themselves, kindling God's wrath; as a result several thousand had died, many saved through Moses' intercession.

2. Nadab and Abihu – Leviticus 10:1-3

- a. We can see in this particular event this core idea that it is possible for an individual to do something even in the proper environment yet do it in the wrong way.
- b. Aaron's sons were uniquely chosen by God to be priests in His tabernacle. They were the right servants in the right place surrounded by the right things. But on the day of their ordination they chose to offer "strange fire" - unauthorized.
- c. They did not do what was specifically prescribed for priests as those who lead the people in worship. Fire went out from the Lord and devoured them. "... *It is what the LORD spoke, saying, 'By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored.'*" (Lev 10:3).

3. King Saul – 1 Samuel 13:8-14

- a. Saul, Israel's first king, was unwilling to wait for Samuel for the seven days that he was ordered - as a test of his faith - and usurped the authority of the priest by offering worship by presenting animal sacrifice.
- b. Not only was he rebuked for his disobedience; this became beginning of the end for Saul as king.
4. Many more examples could be provided that God cares whether or not we do specifically what He tells us what we ought to do, and if we fail to do that they were serious consequences. God did not just pass over this aspect on the basis that one simply trying to do their best and what pleases you, pleases Me.
5. Thus, there is a way to be wrong in worship - by disobeying God.

II. Scripture Reveals 4 Kinds of Unacceptable Worship

A. The Worship of False gods – Romans 1:21-23

1. The worship of false gods is what the Bible describes as idolatry. We live in a time and culture where physical idolatry is a problem or a thing we are tempted to engage in, but this was not the case for people in Biblical times.
2. Physical idolatry was a major problem for God's people - for the Jews in Canaan, surrounded by idolatrous nations, and for the church, Gentiles coming out of idolatry.
3. The Bible has much to say about the sin of idolatry as both Jews and Gentiles struggled with it, and we might be inclined to dismiss it totally from our minds.

4. The tendency to put something over and above God; the propensity to materialize the spiritual, and to focus on things that affect our lives are just as problem for us today as it was for those that lived during Biblical times.
5. Other forms of idolatry exist and stand just as condemned - materialism, fame or power, or even our desires etc (Matt.6:24; Col.3:5; Eph.5:5).
6. What God wants His people to realize is that He is in control and it He that we to were to fear and worship.

B. The Worship of the True God in a Wrong Form

1. This more accurately describes what the Israelites did at Sinai. They claimed to be worshipping the true God (the one that brought them out of Egypt). But they had reduced Him to an image.
2. They were willing to take a spiritual God and reduced Him down to something that could see and touch.
3. But what they failed to grasp throughout their times as God's people that God is a spirit and in no time did He reveal Himself physically for the precise purpose to this very thing from happening - for making and worshipping idol images (Ex.20:4; Dt.4:15-19).
4. This is a problem for many today; the use of physical images to represent God - cross of Jesus, or image of Jesus or Mary and other characters - all in the hope of feeling nearer to God or in His presence.
5. On surface these seem to honor God but they are in fact idolatrous - though Catholicism greatly defends it.

C. The Worship of the True God in a Self-Styled Manner – Matthew 15:8-9

1. Nadab & Abihu, Saul, Jeroboam & others were guilty of choosing their way over God's way - individuals who knew what God had commanded, but attempted to worship God in some other way; to substitute the traditions of men to take the place of the actual words of God (cp. 1 Kings 12:32).
2. Jesus spoke about this in regard to the elders for promoting their traditions above what God had commanded through Moses (Matthew 15:8-9).
3. Jesus here is addressing the actions of the elders / Pharisees in exalting their traditions above the commands of God resulting in false worship - worship that was wrong and in vain - empty.
4. As we think about the way we worship today, can we find it in the NT? We know that the NT church never used instrumental music in worship, never celebrated a religious holiday, used choirs, called a baptism of H.S...so many things practiced by so many churches that are not found in NT.
5. These are religions or worship that is self-styled or designed that Paul warns us against (Col.2:23).
6. God has revealed the activities of worship that please Him. To substitute the traditions of men is to make void our worship.

D. The Worship of the True God, in the Right Manner, But With a Wrong Attitude

1. Prior to Israel's exile into Babylon, the prophets had condemned the nation not for unauthorized worship but for worship when their lives were not right (Amos 5:21-25; Isaiah 1:11-15)
2. Post captivity, their problem was offering a second rate worship - offering animals that were lame and sick (Malachi 1:7-10).
3. In other words, their heart were not right - or not in it; their cared little about the quality of their worship.
4. As we sing, pray, listen to a lesson, take the Lord's Supper, give of our means, are we offering to God a second rate worship; are we as engaged spiritually, as we are physically?
5. The most critical words of Jesus were reserved for those who claimed to be religious and worshipers, but were inwardly evil and apathetic; that should compel to look out at what our worship needs to be and recognize that it could be wrong.
6. But we must have a close association with His word to learn how to worship. The **proper object**: The one true God, The **proper manner**: according to revealed truth, and the **proper attitude**: with thanksgiving and adoration, and a pure life.

III. How did the N.T. Church Worship God?

A. The Lord's Supper - Acts 20:7

1. Together with Acts 2:42 and 1 Corinthians 11:20 this passage establishes the breaking of breaking as partaking of the Lord's Supper and the day on which it is to be taken.
2. This is not just an incidental mentioning of the day. The first day of the week was significant to Christians:
 - a. The first assembly of the Lord's church on Pentecost was on the first day of the week.
 - b. Jesus arose from the dead on the first day of the week (John 20:1)

3. This supper consisted of eating the unleavened bread and drinking the fruit of the vine as it appeared on the Passover table. On the night of His betrayal Jesus gave these two elements of the Passover feast specific and prophetic significance. He took bread, broke it, and said, “*eat this in memory of my body.*” He gave them a cup of the fruit of the vine, and said, “*divide this among yourselves and drink it, this is [i.e., represents] my blood.*”

B. Giving: (taking up a collection) – 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; There are several important elements in this context:

1. First, this giving is a serious responsibility. The term “order” denotes a command; not optional. But despite the obligation, it is to be done cheerfully, not grudgingly. – **2 Cor. 9:7** (“*free will offering*”) as it is an activity of the heart. Generosity is a vital characteristic of being a Christian.
2. Christians were expected to give “as he may prosper,” or “according to his ability” (cp. Acts 11:29). This is proportional giving. Amazingly, some in the early church gave even beyond their ability (2 Cor. 8:3). Again the focus is on the heart, as the widow who gave all that she had, yet it was less in amount than many others (Mark 12:2-44).

C. Prayer – Acts 2:42

1. Prayer was fundamental part of Christian fellowship practiced among the early church, from the day its establishment (cp. Acts 12:5).
2. Prayer is to be offered to God without fear or doubting, by men whose lives are holy (1 Timothy 2:8).

D. Preaching the Word – Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 14:16

1. The content of the teaching must be the Scriptures for it alone has the power to equip the Christian (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
2. The godly teacher will bring the sacred Scriptures into contact with the minds of his audience; he will let heaven’s power do its work (Romans 1:16).

E. Singing – 1 Corinthians 14:16; Ephesians 5:18-19; Colossians 3:16

1. Christians are commanded to sing, making melody in the heart: Notice some important elements here:
 - a. Christians “*speak to one another*” and “*teach and admonish one another*” in song. This underscores the corporate nature of the musical portion of church worship. Singing is an expression of praise for every Christian, not just a few.
 - b. The songs that are utilized are spiritual songs (hymns, psalms); not secular songs. The words matter, it is not a matter of music alone.
2. We don’t use instruments not because of affordability, or pleasure; but for having no scriptural basis.

Conclusion

1. As the church of Christ, worshiping God is our highest priority. It is sobering to recognize that we could do it wrong. It is thrilling to know that we can do it so that it is a sweet smelling aroma before Him.
2. We need to look carefully at the words of the N.T. and make sure we have authority for all that we do in worship. We need to learn to engage our heart and mind in every activity of worship. We need to worship right.