

Many in the religious world are confused about true worship to God. In this tract, I will show that worship to God has a beginning and an end. I will also show how we are supposed to worship God, and what the Bible says about vain worship.

First, I want to point out that worship to God has a beginning and an end. It is something we do as a specific act and at a specific time. This is true in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. For instance, when Abraham took his son to the mountain to sacrifice him to the Lord, he told the young men with him, "Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you (Gen. 22:5)." Now, we know that God was testing Abraham and He would not allow him to take his son's life. But, notice the plain truth of what Abraham said. He was going to worship, which means his worship to God would have a beginning and it would be at a specific place. When he returned, his worship would be done.

Another example is when Paul tells Felix, "Because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship (Acts 24:11)." In context, Paul was giving his defense before Felix. However, the point I want to make is that Paul went to Jerusalem for the purpose to worship God. So, just like Abraham, Paul's worship would have a beginning, end and would be at a specific place.

Under the Old Testament, the Sabbath day, which is our Saturday, was as a special day when the children of Israel would rest from their labors and worship God. Under the New Testament, the first day of the week is a special day set aside for Christians to assemble to form the body of Christ for the specific purpose of worshipping God. When we do this, we are honoring God. The reason the first day of the week is special is because Jesus overcame the grave that day proving that He is our Messiah. Just as the Sabbath day was to be observed every Saturday under the Old Testament, Christians are supposed to observe every Lord's day, which is our Sunday. In fact, we are commanded not to forsake the assembling of the saints (Heb. 10:25). Since we are commanded to assemble, this indicates that we have a specific time and place that we will meet, which

means our worship to God has a beginning and an end.

There are several other passages that teach that the first day of the week is a special day that Christians assemble for the specific purpose of worshipping God. For instance, Paul commands that we give on the first day of week (1 Cor. 16:1-2). Now, if there wasn't a specific day that they came together to worship God, then why would Paul choose the first day of week as the day to give your money? It's obvious. The first day of the week is a special day when Christians are to assemble. Our next example comes from the following verse:

Acts 20:6 But we sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days joined them at Troas, where we stayed seven days. ⁷ Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.

According to Acts 20:16, Paul was in a hurry to get Jerusalem by the day of Pentecost, yet he stayed at Troas for seven days so he could partake of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week. Now, if every day was the same and it didn't matter when they gave or when they observed the Lord's Supper. Then they could have assembled on Tuesday or even Wednesday, so Paul could preach his message and be on his way without having to wait until the first day of the week. However, that's not what happened because observing the Lord's Supper and giving of your money is supposed to be done on the first day of the week. It is also significant that the church began on the first day of the week (Acts 2).

Now, the reason I am stressing that our worship to God has a beginning and an end is because there are some that teach that all of life is worship to God. It should be obvious this is not the case or else we could say that playing golf or cleaning the house is worshipping God. Surely we can see that not all of life is worship to God.

We also need to realize there are about six different Greek words that are translated as worship in our Bible. Some carry the meaning of a specific worship

to God while others mean to show reverence for God or for man. So, when we are not in public worship, we must still show reverence to God because we are His servants. So, when we do a good deed for someone, or we do the right thing instead of the wrong thing, we are showing reverence and honor to God. Paul said, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom. 12:1)."

So, I hope you can see that not all of life is worship. Sunday is the specific day that we assemble to worship God and our worship has a beginning and an end. Outside the assembly, we must still show reverence to God by living holy lives.

Now let's take a look at what David says about the purpose of worshipping God in following verses:

Psalm 122:1 I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the house of the LORD." ² Our feet have been standing Within your gates, O Jerusalem!

Even though David was under Moses' Law, his words capture the very essence of what worship to God is all about. Notice, he was full of joy when it was time for him to go into the house of the Lord and verse 2 says they were standing within the gates ready and waiting with anticipation to begin their worship to God. How many Christians have this attitude? Do we arrive at the building early with anticipation of worshipping God or do we allow ourselves just enough time to make it as the service begins? What happens when we do this? Well, any little unplanned delay can cause us to be late for the worship service. That is why it is important for us to prepare earlier, so we can make it to the worship service before it begins. The reason David was so glad to be at the house of the Lord was so he could praise Him, thank Him and pray to Him. David's focus is on God and nothing else. So, when Christians come together, the primary reason we assemble is to worship God. The worship service is not a social hour. Now, we can have good fellowship and enjoy

each others company, but this is just a by-product of our primary purpose. I have heard others say they come to worship to recharge their batteries. This certainly could happen, but this is still a by-product of our primary purpose for worshipping God. If we come to the worship service for entertainment or to be social, then we have missed the entire purpose of true worship.

Now let's examine how we are supposed to worship God. When Jesus was talking to the Samaritan woman by the well, He tells us how we must worship God. He said, "God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24)." Notice, when we worship God, we must worship in spirit AND truth. These two elements must be in place for true worship to occur. When we worship in spirit, we are worshipping from a sincere heart and our thoughts are on God. When we worship in truth, we are worshipping according to God's Word (Jn. 17:17). So, our worship to God must come from a sincere heart and be regulated by the Word of God because it is our authority and guide (2 Tim. 3:16-17). That is why Paul says, "...that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written... (1 Cor. 4:6)." He also says, "And *whatever* you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him (Col. 3:17)." So, how we worship God must come from the Word of God. If God allowed us to worship Him any way we wanted to, it would end up in confusion. However, Paul said, "For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints (1 Cor. 14:33)." Again, this teaches us that we must worship God His way and not our way.

Now let's examine vain worship. Obviously, if there is right way to worship, then there is also a wrong way to worship. We can see this in action in Mark 7. The Pharisees wanted to know why Jesus' disciples were eating without washing their hands. Notice Jesus' response in following verses:

Mark 7:6 He answered and said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with *their* lips, But their heart is far from Me. ⁷ And in vain they worship Me, Teaching *as* doctrines the commandments of men.' ⁸ "For laying aside the

commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men -- the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do." ⁹ He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition." ¹⁰ "For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' ¹¹ "But you say, 'If a man says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban" -- ' (that is, a gift to God), ¹² "then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, ¹³ "making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do."

The Pharisees corrupted the Word of God by making their own traditions take the place of God's way. Notice, Jesus says they were worshipping God in vain. Vain worship is not acceptable to God. So, we must be careful with whom we worship with. If the church you attend does not regulate its worship service according to God's Word, then it will be considered vain worship and He will not accept it. Paul teaches us more about self-imposed religion in the following verses:

Colossians 2:18 Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, ¹⁹ and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God. ²⁰ Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations -- ²¹ "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," ²² which all concern things which perish with the using -- according to the commandments and doctrines of men? ²³ These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

Paul makes it clear that no one is to invent the own religion. As Christians, we should not allow ourselves to be deceived by humans and take part in man-made

doctrines or we will lose our reward of making it to heaven. This warning should strike fear in those who call themselves denominations because they worship God in their own way, which means they have added or taken away from God's pattern of worship.

Another kind of vain worship is ignorant worship. We have an example of this in Acts 17. The people in Athens had all kinds of idols and altars they were worshipping. They even had an altar made for an unknown God (Acts 17:22-23). Paul took this opportunity to explain to these people who the true and only God was so they could render proper worship. Unfortunately, only a few changed their ways. I also want you to consider what Paul said in following verses:

Romans 10:1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. ² For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. ³ For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.

Once again, Paul finds people who were ignorant of God's righteousness. Now, it is understandable that some would be ignorant of God's way in the first century because the new covenant was being revealed for the first time. However, today we don't have any valid excuses for worshipping God in ignorance because we have God's fully revealed Word in our Bibles and everyone can understand it.

Acts 17:30 "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent"

So, worshipping God in ignorance is still vain worship.

Our final example of vain worship comes from what the soldiers did to Jesus before He was crucified.

Mark 15:19 Then they struck Him on the head with a reed and spat on Him; and bowing the knee, they worshipped Him. ²⁰ And when they had mocked Him, they took the purple off Him,

put His own clothes on Him, and led Him out to crucify Him.

These men were making a mockery of Jesus and many people who call themselves Christians would say, "I would never do what these soldiers did." However, some of these same people don't take the Word of God seriously and they worship God in their own way. When they do this, they are no different from these soldiers because they are making a mockery of Jesus and the church He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28). Those who continue to show disrespect to God by worshipping Him in vain will not make it to heaven, and they will face the wrath of God.

2 Thessalonians 1:7 when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, ⁸ in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,

In conclusion, I hope this tract has shown you just how serious we should be when we worship God in spirit and truth.

If you have questions or comments send them to lgchurchofchrist@cablone.net.

What Is True Worship?

