

It Matters To God How He Is Worshiped

2074

Worship of God is not a rare phenomenon. The history of man is principally a history of two things: worship and war. One cannot study any era of man's history without dealing with the issues of religion and military conflict. People of every culture everywhere on earth have always worshiped and fought, though only a tiny percentage of either the worship or fighting of men has ever pleased God. Paul said his calling was to preach the truth to the Gentiles so that their worship of God might be made acceptable to God by being sanctified by the holy Ghost (Rom. 15:16). Paul did not have to convince Gentiles that they should worship; they had always been extremely religious. His challenge was to convince them to worship God as God demanded that He be worshiped, in spirit and in truth.

The most dreadful and immediate punishments dealt to man in the Bible were handed out to certain of God's own children while they were worshiping God. There has always been a death penalty for God's people who worship in ways that are contrary to the commandments of their God. On the other hand, the greatest blessings of God have always belonged to those who belong to God and who keep His commandments and worship Him as He says to worship.

Man does not know how to worship God. He must be helped by God to know what is appropriate to His holiness. People have always had what seemed to them to be good ideas about how to honor God in worship, but God has never been pleased with the good ideas of humans. God's commandments concerning how to worship Him are not merely good ideas; they are commandments that are so holy that there is a death penalty for failure to comply with them.

Here are a few examples of the blessings for proper worship and curses for self-willed worship of God:

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| Genesis 8:20 | Noah offered to God sacrifices of clean animals, and then obtained a promise from God that the earth would never again be destroyed by a flood. |
| Exodus 32:19, 25, 35 | The Israelites worshiped God by striping themselves naked and by dancing before and bowing down to the golden calf they built. God responded by sending a plague among them. |
| Leviticus 10 | Inside the tabernacle, Aaron's two oldest sons offered incense that God had not commanded Israel to offer, and God killed them both immediately. |
| Number 16:35 | Two hundred and fifty men worshiped the LORD without being ordained to do so, and fire came out from God and burned them alive. |
| Deut. 12:1-8 | God commanded Israel never again to worship Him the way that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob worshiped him, nor to worship Him in the same places where they worshiped Him. |

- Joshua 5:2-15 At Gilgal, Israel renewed its covenant with the LORD by circumcising those uncircumcised among them, and then they worshiped God by observing the Passover according to the Law, and then Joshua was visited by the Captain of the LORD's army.
- Judges 8:27 Gideon worshiped God by making an golden ephod for Israel to worship, and his house was cursed to suffer a tragic end.
- Ruth Ruth renounced the gods of Moab and moved to Judah to serve Jehovah according to the Law, and God blessed her to become the great-grandmother of David and an ancestor of the Savior, Jesus.
- 1 Samuel 2:17 The unlawful, immoral, and oppressive worship style of Eli's two sons caused God's people to hate to come to Shiloh to worship God and brought upon Eli's entire family a most dreadful curse: expulsion from the priesthood and perpetual physical deformity and poverty for every generation of Eli's descendants.
- 2 Samuel 6:6-7 Uzzah touched the ark, and God immediately killed him.
- 1 Kings 11:1-6 Solomon built altars for his foreign wives so that they could worship their gods. God cursed him with constant trouble, and then took from the house of David its dominion over ten of the tribes of Israel.
- 2 Kings 10:28-30 King Jehu "destroyed Baal out of Israel", and God rewarded him with a promise concerning his offspring for the next four generations.

God accepted the worship of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that they offered upon high places of Canaan's land. Later, however, God commanded Israel never to worship Him in high places again, but in the one place, and in the one way, that He chose. Still later, Jesus taught that just as God had abandoned the high places and had chosen to be worshiped at Jerusalem with the ceremonies of the Law, so now He was abandoning the ceremonial worship of the Law at Jerusalem and accepted man's worship only if it was "in spirit and in truth" (Jn. 4).

God blessed Abraham and the patriarchs when they worshiped Him in Canaan's high places. But it was rebellion against God for any Israelite to worship God in those same high places after God chose Jerusalem as the place of acceptable sacrifice. Just so, when God finished with the ceremonial Law, it became rebellion against God for men to worship God with ceremonies. God sent His Son to the agony of the cross to make available the pure worship of spirit and truth, and when Jesus accomplished that, every other form of worship was made sinful. As always, men have some clever ideas as to how to worship God. And as always, those clever methods of worship are as "filthy rags" to the Almighty.

There is only one way to please God; that is, to obey Him. His commandments concerning how to obey Him in worship are now, as always, a matter of life and death.