

TRUTH

“. . . Your word is truth” (John 17:17)

November 2023

WORSHIP FROM THE HEART VERSUS JUST GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS

God’s word devotes attention to many subjects, some more than others. Some that receive frequent attention are the character of God, man’s plight in sin, the scheme of redemption, and the worship and praise that God desires and deserves.

God has always instructed and commanded humanity in how to offer worship to Him. Even with His direction, the differences of what is seen in the attempts to worship the Almighty are notable. For some, worship is entertainment-oriented, self-serving, and entirely oblivious of the instruction found in God’s word; emotionalism rules the day. At the other end of the spectrum, there are those who are following the actions God has given but would not show one glimmer of excitement or emotion even if the building/meeting place were on fire. Rather than following the trends we see around us, we should be looking to Scripture to lead us in how we are going to approach our heavenly Father with worship that is acceptable and pleasing to Him.

In considering the Biblical instruction of worship, we must realize that while the form in which worship is conducted [what we are doing] matters greatly to God, it is not the proper form alone that makes worship acceptable to God. He is also concerned with humanity bringing a wholehearted devotion to Him. God is not pleased with worship that merely “goes through the motions.” A worship that meets the form of Scripture but is devoid of a heart that loves and desires to praise Him will never be acceptable. Jesus recounts Isaiah’s condemnation of those who attempted to worship God outwardly, but not inwardly: “*Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men’*” (Matthew 15:7-9). What God has demanded is that His followers be servants whose words and

actions in worship evidence the true state of their hearts. He desires and demands genuine devotion and reverence, not merely outward conformity to His instructions.

As Jesus discussed worship with the woman from Samaria (John 4:1-42), she stated a difference between the Samaritans and the Israelites: “*Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship*” (John 4:20). Jesus acknowledged the difference between the Samaritan and Jewish worship. He then said, “*But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth*” (John 4:23,24). The worship “*in spirit*” deals with the attitude of the worshipper. Jesus makes worship a matter of the heart. The worship “*in truth*” is what is in harmony with the nature and will of God. If one is to offer worship that pleases God, it must be by following what God has said regarding worship. Obeying what God has given by inspiration will cause the worshipper to come with a sincere heart in offering what God has instructed as the “*sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name*” (Hebrews 13:15).

One of our difficulties in approaching God properly, “*in spirit and truth,*” is in the regularity of our worship. We can face temptation in the form of distraction when things that are routine become mundane. This could lead us to a point where we “go through the motions” without putting much thought or heart into our worship of God. Our minds can be engrossed in matters of life while our bodies are engaged in the form of worship. We must put hard work into our preparations for and the carrying out of our praise to God. Let us keep our hearts centered on God as we are led by the truth so that our worship is acceptable and pleasing to Him.

-- Dave Leonard

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF KING JOSIAH

Do you know what Jehovah thought about Josiah, who was the fifteenth of Judah's nineteen kings? The Bible affirms this about Josiah: "*Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to the Law of Moses, nor after him did any arise like him*" (2 Kings 23:25).

For historical perspective, the dates of Josiah's reign were B.C. 640-609. Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:1,2) and Zephaniah (Zephaniah 1:1) were prophets of the Lord during the time that Josiah was on the throne.

Here are some landmark occasions during the lifetime of Josiah:

Age 8 – He began to reign as king of Judah (2 Chronicles 34:1).

Age 16 (8th year of his reign) – He began to seek the Lord (2 Chronicles 34:3).

Age 20 (12th year of his reign) – He began to purge the nation of idolatry (2 Chronicles 34:3).

Age 21 (13th year of his reign) – Jeremiah began to serve as a prophet (Jeremiah 1:2). Jeremiah and Josiah would have been a formidable team for good!

Age 26 (18th year of his reign) – He began to repair the temple. In the process, the book of the law was found there (2 Chronicles 34:8,14,15).

Age 39 (31st year of his reign) – He was killed in battle against the Egyptian army, leaving behind a grieving nation (2 Chronicles 35:23-25).

During his time on Judah's throne, Josiah carried out widespread reforms to remove spiritual corruption in Judah. He took away idolatry, doing so even in some parts of the territory that originally had been part of the Northern Kingdom (2 Chronicles 34:3-7,33).

In fulfillment of a prophecy that was made about three hundred years before he became king, Josiah burned the bones of men on Jeroboam's altar, then he tore it down (2 Kings 23:15,16). How could that prophet of God, three hundred years in advance, know what Josiah would do, and how could he possibly know the king's name (1 Kings 13:1,2)? The only plausible answer is that he was guided to speak by God's Spirit. The Bible's fulfilled prophecy is a strong proof that it is the word of God.

Among those who reigned as king over God's people, Josiah was the last great beacon of light until the Christ Himself became King. Even though the last four kings of Judah were all Josiah's close offspring (three sons and a grandson), following Josiah's death, everything was "downhill" in Judah. Each of those final monarchs was evil, and not one of them came close to being the man of God that Josiah was.

Here is a quick glance at some other lasting lessons we can glean from Josiah's memorable life:

- Josiah had a good heart. He sought the Lord "*while he was still young*" (2 Chronicles 34:3), and throughout his lifetime showed a tender and humble heart (2 Chronicles 34:27). There is no substitute for a good, humble heart. Having such a heart is the key to being a faithful servant of the Lord (Luke 8:15).

- In the process of repairing the temple during Josiah's regime, what kind of people were involved? The men worked "*faithfully*." In addition, there were skilled helpers, as well as overseers-supervisors (2 Chronicles 34:11-13). The Lord's work needs those same elements today: faithfulness, ability, and accountability (someone responsible for seeing to it that the work is done properly).

- Three observations concerning Josiah's religious reforms: (1) His reforms showed that Josiah had the courage to take action against things to which the people already were accustomed, as well as against activities that had been popular in the past . . . (2) Despite Josiah's noble efforts to straighten out Judah's spiritual problems, God still declared that Judah had forsaken Him and, thus, His wrath would be poured out on it (2 Chronicles 34:25). This reminds us that, while one person can be a godly influence, he cannot "*do it all*" by himself, and he certainly cannot force others to make righteous choices . . . (3) In the fifty-five Bible chapters which they penned, Jeremiah and Zephaniah often spoke against the wickedness of Judah, but they never once mentioned any of Josiah's reforms. Apparently those reforms were never fully embraced in the hearts of the people.

- During Josiah's reign, a priest of God found the book of the law of God in the temple (2 Chronicles 34:14-18). If the book of God's law was "*found*" in His house, that sounds as if it was lost or had been unnoticed. May we always have a lofty respect for God's word, never neglect it, and be committed to making it a real, practical part of our daily lives.

- We need to be appreciative of good people like Josiah who are so dedicated and put forth their best effort to do God's will. Their worth "*is far above rubies*" (Proverbs 31:10). In the presence of Judah's elders, priests, prophets, and all the people, Josiah made a covenant with God to keep His commands with all his heart and soul (2 Kings 23:1-3; 2 Chronicles 34:29-33). Josiah's godly leadership was a huge blessing to God's people!

Take time to investigate the divine record of Josiah's life. You will be blessed for doing so!

-- Roger D. Campbell

Jesus — the Head of the Church

In the inspired writings of the apostle Paul, he describes the Christ's church as His body. The body is the church, and the church is the body. We read such language in Romans 12:4,5, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Ephesians 1:22,23, and Colossians 1:18,24.

In connection with the church being called Jesus' spiritual body, the Bible proclaims that the Christ is the Head of the church. The Promiser of the church (Matthew 16:18) and the Purchaser of the church (Acts 20:28) also serves as her Head. God the Father put all things under Jesus' feet "*and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body . . .*" (Ephesians 1:22,23). In that same letter, we also read that "*Christ is head of the church*" (Ephesians 5:23). To the saints in Colosse, Paul wrote this about the Son of God: "*And He is the head of the body, the church*" (Colossians 1:18).

The Christ's role as Head of His church points to **His authority**. Jesus *rules over* His spiritual body. The church is not a democracy, but rather is governed by its Head, Jesus. All authority has been given to the Christ in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). In the church, it is God's will for Jesus to have preeminence in all things (Colossians 1:18). "Preeminence" means first place or top rank.

As Head over the church, the Christ has a **unique position**. Jesus is not *one of* the body's heads . . . He is His church's one-and-only Head, and He shares that headship with no one. Any arrangement that has Jesus as one Head in heaven and a human who has been chosen by other humans to serve as the church's earthly head (making him/her head number two), is a plan that is not from the Lord (Matthew 21:25).

The church has an obligation to its Head. What is that? Be in subjection to Him. "*Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything*" (Ephesians 5:24). The Holy Spirit uses God's expectation for the church (submit to its Head) to show what He expects of wives (submit to their husbands). How does the church show its submission to the King of kings? By doing what He says for us to do (Luke 6:46).

There is one body (Ephesians 4:4) and that one body has one Head, Jesus. Here is a final observation about Him being Head over His church. No man-made religious group has the right to claim Jesus as its head. He promised one church, He purchased only one church, and He serves as Head of that church and no other. We stand in awe of God's mighty Son. Let us honor our Head by doing His will in all things.

-- Roger D. Campbell

Lessons from 1 John 5:1-5

Continuing our study of lessons from 1 John, we are looking this month at 1 John 5:1-5. This section of 1 John deals with love for brethren, love for God, and overcoming the world. Note some highlights from these five verses.

(1) Christians are to love one another (5:1,2). John writes a great deal about the need for Christian brethren to have love one toward another. Here, John points out that those who have responded to Jesus through obedient faith are born of God; in other words, they are God's children. John goes on to say, those who love "*Him who begot*" (the Father) also love "*him who is begotten of Him*" (the children of God). John emphasizes this point in verse 2, saying, "*. . . we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.*" Essentially, John says, "We love God, right? To love God means to keep His commandments, and one of those commandments is to love His children."

It is worth mentioning here that some erroneously use 1 John 5:1 to teach that the only requirement to be "*born of God*" (God's child) is simply to believe. However, (1) John is writing to Christians who already are God's children, (2) faith/belief is often used to represent the totality of one's obedience to God (see Acts 16:30-34, noting when the man is called a believer), and (3) John says just two verses later (1 John 5:3) that one's love for God is tied to keeping His commandments.

(2) Christians love one another because they love God (5:3). In 5:1, John shows that loving the Father naturally means loving the Father's children. In 5:2, he ties Christians' love for their brethren to love for God. In 5:3 (and the end of 5:2), he shows that loving God means keeping His commandments. John thus echoes Jesus' admonition, "*If you love Me, keep My commandments*" (John 14:15). Lest any become discouraged, John hastens to remind us in the last part of 5:3, "*His commandments are not burdensome.*"

(3) Christians will overcome through Jesus (5:4,5). Jesus, born of God (John 1:14,18; 3:16), has overcome "*the world*" (symbolic of Satan and his evil, John 16:33; 1 John 2:15-17). Christians, born again (John 3:3-5), will also overcome. How? By "*our faith*" (5:4). How do we get faith? By hearing God's word (Romans 10:17). God's word is so important!

Going to heaven and overcoming the world comes down to (1) loving God supremely, (2) loving our brethren, and (3) keeping faith strong through God's word (compare Jesus' statement – Matthew 22:37-40).

-- Chad Dollahite

THE CHALLENGE OF FALSE TEACHING IN RELIGION

The reality and widespread influence of false religious teachings are undeniable. False teaching is a worldwide curse to mankind. It is a pandemic that exceeds the horrors of cancer or a coronavirus.

Just as there is one true God who is Lord of heaven and earth (Acts 17:24), so there are “*so-called gods*” whom humans worship (1 Corinthians 8:5). There is the Christ, and there are false Christs (Matthew 24:24). There were genuine apostles, and there are false apostles (2 Corinthians 11:13), just like there were true prophets and false prophets (Matthew 24:24) as well as teachers of truth and false teachers (2 Peter 2:1). To this day, there are those who embrace, teach, and practice the truth; at the same time, others embrace, teach, and practice falsehood.

The whole world is under the sway of the wicked one (1 John 5:19). One of the devil’s most effective ways of keeping people confused and corrupt spiritually is the constant propagation of false religious messages. We see idolatrous temples, hear fantasy-filled theories about modern-day prophets, and encounter those who push and peddle messages which contradict or are in addition to God’s truth. Living in a world where false teaching is spread 24/7 daily can be mentally challenging for a Christian.

False teaching deceives. The Bible describes false apostles as “deceitful workers” (2 Corinthians 11:13), and the Christ warned about false prophets who give off the appearance of being sheep, but in reality are false prophets (Matthew 7:15). Deception, fables, lies, and twisting Scriptures are marks of false teaching.

False teaching divides. It separates the followers of man-made messages from truth-followers. God’s truth brings about the unity that He desires (John 17:17-23). In contrast, denominationalism promotes the concept that there is one body of the Christ that is divided into/comprised of many separate churches (and all of these “churches” can be pleasing to God). Such a false idea puts a stamp of approval on contradictory messages which cause confusion, chaos, and division, and it is contrary to the spirit of John 17.

False teaching disheartens. Whom does it dishearten? Every false doctrine disturbs, disappoints, and depresses those who love the Lord, love His word, and love the souls of men. It is disheartening when we teach the truth to a family member or friend who is stooped in a man-made religion, but they refuse to humble themselves and forsake the doctrines of men. We feel numb inside when we see a person obey the gospel, but in the course of time he returns to his former religious errors, like a dog and hog returning to their dirty, nasty ways. The pull for a person to go

back to his/her former religious group can be strong. Close ties, comfort, and familiarity of family and friends in a former group can be a strong pull. In some cases, there may be some form of shunning if one does not return. It is a punch to the stomach when we see one who learned and obeyed the truth about salvation later return to a religious group that does not teach the truth about how to receive forgiveness.

False teaching disrupts. This is a huge challenge when we engage in personal evangelism. False messages disrupt our efforts to help people learn and obey the truth. Satan, the god of this age, blinds the eyes of the lost (2 Corinthians 4:4), so they conclude that they do not need to change. False teaching makes those who are lost outside of the Christ feel comfortable praying for forgiveness instead of obeying the gospel, it makes human innovations in worship feel as good as God-authorized worship, and it gives a false sense of comfort and hope to those who are rebellious and immoral. Yes, false teaching disrupts evangelistic efforts like few other things can.

False teaching destroys. It destroys peace and unity among family, friends, and congregations. Look at the damage it did to the churches of Galatia, as false teachers troubled, bewitched, and seduced saints of God to turn to a false gospel (Galatians 1:6-8; 3:1; 5:12). False teaching destroys the souls of those who accept and adhere to it. Those who go beyond the doctrine of the Christ do not possess the Godhead (2 John 9). Saddest of all is the fact that the fruit of false teaching is eternal condemnation: for the teachers and followers. The blind leading the blind to perdition is no laughing matter.

“But how do we know that our way is right?” In the Bible, there is something called “*the way of truth*,” which is “*the right way*” (2 Peter 2:2,15). It is not my way or your way, but *the Lord’s way*. We simply strive to comply with His soul-saving truth.

“But do you not think that those who are led astray by false teaching are sincere, too?” Many of them are, and some of them even adamantly defend their beliefs. To please God, it is essential to be sincere, but it is possible to be sincere and be wrong in what we are doing. Saul of Tarsus was sincere, but still 100% lost outside of Jesus (Acts 26:9-11).

As the darkness of false teaching fills the world, let us remain committed to following God’s truth.

-- Roger D. Campbell

[Unless stated otherwise, all quotes in all articles of *TRUTH* come from the New King James Version; ©1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.]

TRUTH is published each month in order to help educate, edify, encourage, and equip the saints of God.