

Worshipping the Right God in the Wrong Way

Exodus 32:1-6

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April 30, 2023 a.m.

Introduction: Over the past several weeks we have been considering the topic of worship. We looked at the essence of worship [Acclaim the right Person; accomplish the right purpose; & accept the right pattern] & then the elements of worship [Preparation, praise, prayer, presentation, & preaching]. But our study of worship is not complete until we consider some examples of unacceptable worship. There is, of course, the worship of false gods, called idolatry. But we will examine the case of worshipping the right God in the wrong way this morning in Exodus 32:1-6 & then again the worship of God in the right way in Leviticus 10:1-3 in the future. Consider with me this morning the example of worshipping the right God in the wrong way as we see God's response to unacceptable worship. May we be alerted again, not only of our need to properly worship God, but also to make sure our worship is acceptable to Him (cf. I Corinthians 10:11). Our worship is not to be based on our own imagination nor is it to be focused on our own innovation (future message).

I. Was this the worship of the **right** God?

A. The **apparent invention**:

1. Interpreted as the people's desire to abandon the Lord.
2. Indicated by the people's devotion to a false god.

B. The **actual intention**:

1. God's name in Hebrew is "*Elohim*" – a plural word (of majesty); but the same word is sometimes translated as "gods" (it depends on the context).
2. There is only one calf, yet referred to as "*thy gods*."
 - a. This could be translated as "God" – cf. "*which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt*" – a reference of God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt.
 - b. See also Nehemiah 9:18, "*Yea, when they had made them a molten calf, & said, This is thy God that brought thee up out of Egypt, & had wrought great provocations.*" (& cf. I Kings 12:28).
 - c. Compare NKJV & NASB > "*This is your god...*"
3. "*Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD*" (:5) – "Yahweh" or "Jehovah."

Summary: They thought they were worshipping the true God; but they chose to do so the wrong way; in violation of the first commandment ("*Thou shalt have no other gods before Me*") & second commandment ("*Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image...*").

II. Was this the worship of the God of their **imagination**?

A. What **about** the calf?

1. Not a wobbly, new-born, but rather a fully grown ox (as much as 3 years old).
2. The most powerful domesticated animal in their culture (an extremely useful & practical animal in their agricultural society).
3. They perhaps considered this image of God to be complementary.

B. Why **represent** God as a calf?

1. The ox was kept in a stall or pasture until needed.
2. The ox would be ready to help when called upon.
3. "An ox seemed to be a good way to portray their view of what they thought were God's best qualities" (Reimers).

Summary: “The problem is that no one has a high enough view of God. Perfect understanding of who God is would result in perfect trust in His will & perfect obedience to His Word. Until we attain to the glorified state, our conception of God will continue to be deficient. That is why we must not trust humanly conceived worship styles. Only worship forms that God has endorsed in His Word are safe” (Reimers). [Compare & contrast regulative & normative principles of worship.]

C. Why was this wrong?

1. Their worship was based on their own view of God (their wrong thinking about Him?)

Contrast Psalm 46:10, “*Be still, & know that I am God...*”.

Application: What is your view of God?

(1) Is He Holy? Then we should live holy (I Peter 1:15-16).

(2) Is He Omniscient? Then He knows all that we think, say, & do (Psalm 139:1-6).

(3) Is He Omnipresent? Then He is with us wherever we are (Psalm 139:7-12).

(4) Is He Omnipotent? Then He is our Creator & Sovereign (Psalm 139:13-18).

Do you really believe these things about God? If so, would you have thought, said or done anything different last week if you knew that the Lord was standing by your side?

2. Their worship reflected their view that God was a convenient resource Who existed to meet their needs & make them happy. Is that not often true today?
3. Their worship indicated their belief that God could be placated by outward worship but then not called upon otherwise until needed (like the stalled ox). They perhaps thought that God might not like the way they treated Him, but that He was tolerant of their actions.

Application: Weekly Sunday morning attendance, but the rest of the week lived as if God does not exist (“practical atheist?”) or at least not thought of or called upon until He is “needed”?

Summary: God calls them corrupt (:7) & stiff-necked, or rebellious (:9) [Note: God knew what the people were saying even while His was communing with Moses]. Moses intercedes with God to prevent Israel’s complete destruction (32:11-13). The 10 commandments are shattered (32:19, to indicate their breaking of them), the golden calf ground to powder & sprinkled on the water (& the people made to drink it, 32:20) to show the vanity & powerlessness of this image of God. “God rejects worship that derives from human imagination rather than Divine revelation” (Reimers).

Conclusion: Might we avoid worshiping the right God in the wrong way. Our worship is neither to be based on our imagination nor to be focused on our innovation (future message). Remember, true & proper worship is not about you or me – it is about God! Our worship is to be God-centered, not man-centered. Though the world (& worldly churches) emphasizes “It’s all about me!” – our worship is to be all about Him! Our focus is not that we be entertained, but that God be exalted. The essence of proper worship consists of acclaiming the right Person, accomplishing the right purpose, & accepting the right pattern. The elements of worship are preparation, praise, prayer, presentation & preaching. Each element is to give glory to God.

Is your worship of God in spirit & truth? Did God receive your worship today? Does your life demonstrate a proper view of God – not just on Sunday – but throughout the week? May God help us to avoid worship that is based on our own imagination or focused on our own innovation. Might we worship according to His direction by following His instruction.