

7. Worship in Education (4Q 2020—Education)

Biblical Material: Daniel 3, Rev. 14:6–12, Ps. 78:1–17, John 4:7–26, 1 Chron. 16:1–36, Mark 7:1–13.

Quotes

- I am called to worship a God I cannot see, but not to submit to a God I cannot know and prove. *David Shepherd*
- Servant worship is mere mechanical, unthinking, rote obedience. *A. Graham Maxwell*
- Worship changes the worshiper into the image of the One worshiped. *Jack Hayford*
- Worship is a way of seeing the world in the light of God. *Abraham Joshua Heschel*
- Worship is transcendent wonder. *Thomas Carlyle*
- There can be but little liberty on earth while men worship a tyrant in heaven. *Robert Green Ingersoll*
- Forced worship stinks in God's nostrils. *Roger Williams*

Questions

Do we need to be educated as to how to worship? What is at the heart of true worship? What's wrong with rites and ceremonies? Why did God give such specific details in the Old Testament as to how he should be worshiped? What can we learn at God's frustration with his people over worship? How do we deal with forced worship in our educational institutions?

Bible summary

Daniel 3 deals with Nebuchadnezzar's golden statue and the issue of worship. Rev. 14:6–12 is a call to worship the true God. Ps. 78:1–17 demonstrates that there must be content in worship—it is an appreciation of God using the evidence. John 4:7–26 is the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, and includes issues of worship: "I can see you're a prophet, sir," the woman replied. "Tell me this: our ancestors worshiped here on this mountain, but you say that Jerusalem is where we must worship." Jesus replied, "Believe me the time is coming when you won't worship the Father either on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You really don't know the God you're worshiping, while we worship the God we know, for salvation comes from the Jews. But the time is coming—and in fact it's here already—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for these are the kind of worshipers the Father wants. God is Spirit, so worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." John 4:19-24 FBV. 1 Chron. 16:1–36 describes worship in front of the Ark of the Lord. Mark 7:1–13 deals with tradition and worship, and the problems of ceremonialism.

Comment

First—is praise something that God needs, or is it for us? I believe that everything—prayer, song, praise, worship—all are for our benefit. We cannot make God greater than he is by our worship or praise. He is what he is. Praise is our exclamation of joy at discovering God is who he is, and delighting in all his goodness. Not just for ourselves, but in God's incredible role throughout the universe, especially as he answers through demonstration the charges made against him. The great controversy is all about God and who he is, and our praise and joy comes from finding out God is not the kind of person the Devil has described, but that he is the source of all that is good and true and loving—revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

David is a good example of someone who though far from perfect at least knew where to go to find forgiveness and healing. His many psalms reveal his deep-seated awareness of God in his life, and that his failures came from wandering away from his divine Friend. His rapturous songs of joy come from his very personal experience of God, and illustrate our own reactions when we realize all that God has done for each of us. His confessions are also significant (Ps. 32 and 51, for example)—for we cannot gain healing without accepting our need, our desperate condition that will lead to death. In worship, the honest recognition of our sinfulness, specifically stated, is essential as we come to God to find grace and help in time of need. Accepting God’s gift of spiritual healing, what a wonderful sense of liberation, what a recognition of being made new in God’s image! How could we not praise such a God?

Yet all this is way beyond ourselves. Revelation gives us a sense of this wider picture as we catch a glimpse of what is going on in heaven. Our praise is very minor in comparison to the angelic choirs and the praises described in Rev. 4:9–11 and 5:9–13. The whole universe is praising God. Why? Not just for his power and majesty, but *because of the way he uses it!* God needs no praise for being God. We praise him because he has chosen to think always of the other, to give himself without restriction to all of his created beings. In our case, to come among us, suffer at our hands, and be killed—demonstrating in his life and death the kind of person he truly is. Now that’s a God worth praising and worshiping!

In the end the forms and ceremonies are not enough. Not even the ones prescribed by God. Because his people thought that all they needed to do was to follow the regulations, they eventually forgot what they were doing.

When you look at all the regulations that God put in place in the Old Testament—the way the sanctuary was to be made, how the sacrifices were to be performed, how the worshipers were to behave, it almost seems that God was a very demanding person. So when we read the following, we realize that mere observance is not what God wants: “What use are all your many sacrifices to me? asks the Lord. I am sick and tired of your burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fattened animals. I don’t delight in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats! When you come to appear before me in worship, who asked you to proudly tramp around my courts? Don’t bring me any more pointless offerings; your incense is offensive to me. Your new moon festivals and Sabbath observations and your calling of special religious meetings—I can’t stand them because they’re evil, as are your solemn assemblies.” (Isaiah 1:11-13 FBV)

Ellen White comments

We need to educate and train the mind so that we shall have an intelligent faith, and have an understanding friendship with Jesus. Unless we continually cherish friendship between God and our souls, we shall separate from Him, and walk apart from Him. We shall make friends of those around us, and place our trust in humanity, and our affections will be diverted from the true object of worship. We must not allow coldness to chill our love for our Redeemer. If we have fellowship with Him, we must ever set the Lord before us, and treat Him as an honored Friend, giving Him the first place in our affections. {SD 27}

True worship consists in working together with Christ. Prayers, exhortation, and talk are cheap fruits, which are frequently tied on; but fruits that are manifested in good works, in caring for the needy, the fatherless, and widows, are genuine fruits, and grow naturally upon a good tree.— Review and Herald, Aug. 16, 1881. {ChS 96}