

Dangers in Worship

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Introduction

The Lord Jesus Christ said that we must worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). This means that we must worship God with the right attitude and according to the proper form. However, there are many pitfalls along the way. In Ecclesiastes 5:1-7, the wise man Solomon offers his advice regarding dangers in worship. Although he lived during the Mosaic dispensation, Solomon's words continue to hold meaning for the Messianic age. Let us hear and heed his words of wisdom.

John 4:23 "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. 24 "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (NKJ)

ECC 5:1 Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil. 2 Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few. 3 For a dream comes through much activity, and a fool's voice is known by his many words. 4 When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed. 5 it is better not to vow than to vow and not pay. 6 Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger of God that it was an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands? 7 For in the multitude of dreams and many words there is also vanity. But fear God. (NKJ)

Warning Against Formalism

Ecclesiastes 5:1 ... 1 Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil. (NKJ)

The first problem Solomon addresses is that of empty ritualism. He says we must not offer the sacrifice of fools. Many view worship as an empty formality. They are content with the ceremony of religion but do not regard the sense and meaning of it. Others would employ worship as a soothing balm: They attend Sunday services in a vain attempt to compensate for their sinful rebellion during the week. However, the Lord will not tolerate such hypocrisy (Isa. 1:10-17; Amos 5:21-24).

ISA 1:10 Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom; give ear to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah: 11 "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to

Me?” says the Lord. “I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats. 12 “When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts? 13 Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies - I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. 14 Your New Moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. 15 When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. 16 “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, 17 learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.” (NKJ)

AMO 5:21 “I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savor your sacred assemblies. 22 Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, Nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings. 23 Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments. 24 But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream.” (NKJ)

What is the solution? We must walk prudently before God and draw near his throne to listen. Our hearts must be properly attuned to the word of God. It is imperative that we learn the true meaning of worship. Ritual is not enough. Practice and profession must match. An obedient spirit is the basis of true discipleship (Psa. 51:16-17; James 1:22-25).

PSA 51:16 For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart - These, O God, You will not despise. (NKJ)

JAM 1:22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. (NKJ)

Warning Against Irreverence

Ecclesiastes 5:2-3 ... Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few. 3 For a dream comes through much activity, and a fool’s voice is known by his many words. (NKJ)

The second problem that Solomon deals with is that of irreverence. He says that we must avoid being hasty in word and impulsive in thought. Many are arrogant, reckless, and headstrong. They think they have all the answers. They lay aside the law of God and follow their own traditions. Such people often have an exalted sense of their own importance (Prov. 16:18; 29:20; 29:23).

PRO 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. (NKJ)

PRO 29:20 Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him. (NKJ)

PRO 29:23 A man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor. (NKJ)

What is the solution? Our words must be few. In contrast with God's exalted majesty, our condition is indeed lowly. A realization of this fact should fill us with due caution. Reverence and respect are demanded. Humility and reserve are essential. We must approach God in the right way. Those who respect his greatness will remain in silent awe before him (Job 38-41; 42:5-6; Isa. 40:12-18; Hab. 2:20). We should carefully avoid irreverently setting aside God's in favor of our own. His thoughts and ways are infinitely greater than our own. Since God is the potter and we are the clay (Isa. 64:8), he has the right to mold and make us after his will. Let us serve God acceptably with reverence and fear (Heb. 12:28; 1 Pet. 4:11).

Job 42:5 "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. 6 Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (NKJ)

ISA 40:12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, measured heaven with a span and calculated the dust of the earth in a measure? Weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? 13 Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or as His counselor has taught Him? 14 With whom did He take counsel, and who instructed Him, and taught Him in the path of justice? Who taught Him knowledge, and showed Him the way of understanding? 15 Behold, the nations are as a drop in a bucket, and are counted as the small dust on the balance; look, He lifts up the isles as a very little thing. 16 And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor its beasts sufficient for a burnt offering. 17 All nations before Him are as nothing, and they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless. 18 To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him? (NKJ)

HAB 2:20 "But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him." (NKJ)

Isaiah 64:8 But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; and all we are the work of Your hand. (NKJ)

HEB 12:28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. 29 For our God is a consuming fire. (NKJ)

1 Peter 4:11 If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (NKJ)

Warning Against Insincerity

Ecclesiastes 5:4-7 ... 4 When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed. 5 it is better not to vow than to vow and not pay. 6 Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger of God that it was an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands? 7 For in the multitude of dreams and many words there is also vanity. But fear God. (NKJ)

The third problem that Solomon speaks of is that of insincerity. He warns those who try to avoid fulfilling their vows. They promise to serve God, and then want to back out on that promise. Keeping their commitment is harder than they first thought. Various excuses are set forth in a vain attempt to satisfy their conscience. However, God is not satisfied (Num. 30:2; Deut. 23:21; Matt. 23:16-22).

NUM 30:2 "If a man vows a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth." (NKJ)

DEU 23:21 "When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it; for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you." (NKJ)

MAT 23:16 "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.' 17 "Fools and blind. For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? 18 "And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.' 19 "Fools and blind. For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? 20 "Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it. 21 "He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it. 22 "And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it." (NKJ)

What is the solution? We must pay what we vow. Promises should not be uttered lightly. Vows are not made to be broken. Keep your word. Do what you say. Fulfill your promises. This applies to the commitments we make to both God and man (Psalms 24:3-5; Matthew 5:33-36). When you became a Christian you made a lifelong commitment. Don't look back. Don't waver.

PSA 24:3 Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in His holy place? 4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, Nor sworn deceitfully. 5 He shall receive blessing from the Lord, And righteousness from the God of his salvation. (NKJ)

MAT 5:33 "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' 34 "But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; 35 "nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 "Nor shall you swear by your

head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 “But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No.’” (NKJ)

Conclusion

True worship demands a serious, humble and reverent disposition. Let us worship but in spirit and truth. Let us serve God in reverence and awe. Let our religion flow from a good and honest heart. Only then can we worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness (Psa. 29:1-2; 96:7-9).

PSA 29:1 Give unto the Lord, O you mighty ones, Give unto the Lord glory and strength. 2 Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name; Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. (NKJ)

PSA 96:7 Give to the Lord, O kindreds of the peoples, Give to the Lord glory and strength. 8 Give to the Lord the glory due His name; Bring an offering, and come into His courts. 9 Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. Tremble before Him, all the earth. (NKJ)