

Worship (10)**The Secret of Worship (5) – Holiness**

Question: Is holiness an indispensable part of worship? If these people are in fact 'worship leaders', then the consensus of modern Christianity is that it is not.

But, as we have seen – there is a difference between worship and entertainment. The world and the church know that holiness is not essential for entertainment – that's why such people continue to sell records. But one of the secrets of true worship is holiness.

Five times in the Old Testament, we are told to worship in the beauty of holiness. Holiness is lovely, pleasing, and beautiful. There is something about holiness which is pleasing, desirable, beautiful, and lovely. It is to be a secret of worship. Holiness is an environment preferable for worship.

Why should holiness be a secret of worship?

What is holiness?

Holiness is Christlikeness. It is, positionally and practically, taking on the character of God, The divine nature fleshed out through us. Holiness is when we are increasingly separated from sin, and consecrated to God, to be conformed to His image, and used for His glory.

In what way is holiness one of the secrets of worship?**1. Holiness Reverses the Effects of Sin.**

Holiness is of course, in one sense, sinning less. The reason why that is pertinent to worship is simple – sin prevents worship.

Israel had this idea built firmly into their consciousness: Burnt offering – morning and evening, Sabbaths, Feast days; sin offering – for unintentional sins committed either by the people as a whole, or by individuals; guilt offering for restitution against others; peace offering as well as the grain offering. On Passover – there was the Passover Lamb that was killed. On the Day of Atonement, the priest would have two goats – kill one, and release the other.

When the priests themselves approached to do service, they needed to be cleansed. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest first had to offer a sacrifice for his own sin, before becoming the intermediary for the nation's sin.

What would all of this have driven home to an Israelite – sin obstructs fellowship with God. Sin must be dealt with in order to worship.

Why does sin obscure God?

Sin depreciates God. It undervalues the glory of God – **Rom 3:23**. Therefore it does not perceive God to be valuable and worthy of worship. Sin says – God is not enjoyable, God is not to be valued, admired, celebrated, or treasured. Greed and pride and vanity and power and sinful pleasure are to be desired and enjoyed.

Sin is like a man who chews tobacco all the time, until eventually, he hates the taste of sirloin steak. Sin warps your sentiment of what is good and true and upright and noble. You cannot worship when sin dominates. Its sentiment is warped

Holiness is coming to a place of appreciating God. It recognises His glory and value. Like someone who scoffs at a beautiful piece of music because they love junk; after much explanation and exposure, they come to appreciate how beautiful and intricate that music really was. That's what holiness does.

Sin defies God. Sin is as **Isaiah 53:6** says '*turning to our own way*'. Sin says no to the will of God. It violates His desires. As such, it breaks fellowship with Him – and cannot worship. This might sound strong – but disobedience is an act of hate. In disobedience – at the very least – what you do is love your own desires more than those of the one you are disobeying.

Disobedience is saying – my wishes take priority over yours. It is obvious that when you do this – you cannot be worshipping at the same time.

Holiness, on the other hand, is saying 'I want to please you; I love you – and therefore I love your will.'

Jesus said, in **John 14:21** - *He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.*

John 14:15 *If ye love me, keep my commandments.*

Sin defiles us. Sin defiles our mind, thoughts, actions. It sears our conscience, causing us to accuse or excuse ourselves, and hide from God (**Romans 2:15**).

Think of Adam and Eve in the Garden – what was their instinctive reaction to the presence of God in the garden? They hid from God.

John 3:19-21 *And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.*

Holiness however encourages us to come. In practical holiness, we enter into the experience of our position – and so we do not avoid God, but we approach Him.

Heb 10:22 *Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.*

Sin deceives us. Sin is not just actions; sin has justifications for those actions. And those justifications are, by nature, lies. They have to be, because God calls them that. And the more you live by these justifications, the more you are walking in a self-imposed darkness, a fantasy world. It's obvious you can't worship God in this world of lies. A man who believes he is Julius Caesar will not be able to conduct a normal relationship with you – because he refuses or cannot live in the truth about himself, the world, and others. So when we live in sin, we live in a self-imposed darkness.

I John 1:5-10 *This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. ⁶If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all*

unrighteousness. ¹⁰ *If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.*

Notice that walking in the light has to do with confessing our sin, and turning from it. That is holiness and it means we walk in truth – openness, honesty, light. Refusing to do so is to walk in darkness, and to forfeit fellowship with God.

Imagine this: Subjects of a king who develop severe cataracts, with a form of insanity. They see the king as ugly, and see lepers as beautiful. They scorn the king and defy him. Internally they are restless, they know they should not be speaking to the king like that, but they are more and more convinced he is ugly and they are justified. And the more they think like that, the more reasons and lies they have to keep believing that. How do you get such men back to worshipping their king?

Holiness, at once positionally, and by a process practically, clears away the things that obscure God. It clears away the cataracts, takes away the madness, cleanses the conscience, and shines light on our path. Instead of depreciating God, it appreciates Him. Instead of defying Him, it pleases him. Instead of defiling us, it purifies us and encourages us to approach. Instead of deceiving us, it teaches us. It reverses the effects of sin.

2. Holiness is the Divine Structure Which Frees Us to Know Him.

God is a God of Order. The very first thing we learn about God in the Bible is that He took an earth which was without form and void and began to order it. He began to divide things – night and day, sky and sea, land and sea. He then populated the earth with living creatures, one group at a time. He did it in stages. God made order out of chaos. And when He made man in His own image; He charged him to do the same thing “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” And the Bible keeps commenting that God saw that it was good. God had created a world which was ordered and structured so as to make worship natural.

When man sinned, he introduced disorder. Sin is essentially chaotic – it rejects God’s centrality, enthrones the creature, and places everything out of order. The long term effect of sin is to decay, destroy and disorder what God has made.

Holiness is restoring the order which God created. It is repairing the ruins and providing structure again to worship Him in.

Like children who have been out of control for an hour and must now come inside, sit quietly and do a maths problem. Coming in from disorder, they must now adjust to order. They can’t learn until they accept the order in that classroom.

Sinners are like chaotic children – no authority, no desire for God.

Holiness is not an arbitrary set of commands. It is God’s chosen means to create a structured environment in which worship thrives. Each command is designed to overcome the disorder and chaos in our heart, and bring us back into a place where we can know and enjoy God

Seeds need the right environment to thrive. A cake mix needs the right environment to be mixed; to bake it, you need the right environment. To train for athletics you run on a 400 metre track.

The environment might be 'confining' but it actually frees you to accomplish what you need to.

To worship God aright, we must have God's order over our lives. Without it, we are like a train with no railway tracks. We might have zeal, we might have desire – but no structure, and soon our efforts will send us all over the show. Our sinfulness keeps life disorderly which makes worship impossible.

God's commands – His holy law - structured the life of Israel. Relationships, sanitation, diet, childbirth, farming, personal injury, property damage, disease control, treatment of poor, disabled clothing, debt, servants, crime and punishment.

Everywhere you turned, as an Israelite – you found that God had said something about it.

Why did He structure life like this? This structure made it possible, and made it probable, that you would worship God. It confined the Israelite to God's loving environment, where worship was likely to happen:

- [They were submissive to Him, and not in rebellion to Him – the sinful nature was being curbed.
- [They were being reminded of Him and not focused on self.
For example, if an Israelite's neighbour's ox fell – they had to turn aside and help him to lift it up – because God told them to do it.
You had to be dependent on Him to fulfil these commands – you had to trust Him and not take shortcuts. For example – not trading on the Sabbath and trusting God in this.
- [Because you were behaving like Him – justly, equitably, kindly, mercifully, not sinfully. The Jewish law was the most equitable, fair, beautiful law the world had ever seen. Other laws like the Code of Hammurabi fall far short of the consistency of standards in the Law. And if you practiced it – you were coming to know the character of the one who gave it.

God was making it harder for you to alienate yourself from Him, and making it more likely that you would come to Him.

This is why God often tells us that His commands are for our good (**Deut 5:29, 33, 6:3, 6:18**). God knows His commands, if obeyed, are like training a person to become skilled in music – turning disorder into order, chaos into harmony – and produce something of beauty. The training process sometimes seems restrictive, but it produces a wonderful end product. Holiness eventually results in a far more beautiful offering to God – **Rom 12:2**.

3. Holiness is Likeness, which is Nearness.

Question: Who loves God most?

Answer: God loves God most. God loves God most because God is most like God and He is therefore the most intimately acquainted with Him.

Who are the people you get along with most? These are the people who are similar to you in some way or another.

Who are the people you are willing to reveal yourself to most? These are the people who are similar to you.

You might be opposites in taste or in preferences – but when your very characters are opposite to one another – your chances of fellowship are small.

The more you are like Him, the more you know Him, and so are able to enjoy Him and worship Him.

I John 1:7 *But if we walk in the light as He is in the light – we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.*

I John 2:5 *But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.*

Amos 3:3 *Can two walk together, unless they are agreed.*

Matt 5:8 *Blessed are the pure in heart – for they shall see God.*

Jam 4:7-9 *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*

⁂ Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. ⁹Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.

Submission – cleansing, purification, repentance – all speak of holiness. And what is one of the commands – *draw near to God, and He will draw near to you*. As you draw near to Him, and become more like Him, He will become increasingly known to you in personal fellowship.

The more you are like Him, the more He is pleased to reveal Himself to you in illumination and so you are able to worship Him.

Does God have favourites? No. But does God have friends? Yes – believers who choose to want to be like Him, and so enjoy fellowship with Him, and please Him.

What pleases God most is to see something of Himself in you. And, when He is pleased, He reveals Himself all the more.

Again we come back to Israel - **Lev 11:44-45, 19:2, 20:7**.

This is the overarching command – ‘*You be this way, because I am this way.*’ For us to fellowship – you must be like I am. If you are different from me, fellowship and worship cannot occur.

The secret of worship is holiness. Holiness reverses the effects of sin; it provides the structure in which to know Him; it makes us like Him, so as to draw near to Him.