

Hindrances to Worship

I. God is Looking for Worshipers

In chapter 4 of the Gospel of John, Jesus told the woman at the well, “God is looking for those who will worship Him.” Second Chronicles 16:9 says, *“For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him...”*

God not only wants converts in the earth, He also wants people who will spend time in fellowship with Him. However, His desire is that we come to Him with a willing heart. He will not force us to worship Him. God delights when His people seek after Him. He delights when people desire to worship Him with all of their hearts.

Numbers 16 illustrates the results of false worship and the results of true worship. False worship ultimately resulted in the children of Israel murmuring against Moses and Aaron and a plague that killed 14,700 people. However, true worship caused the plague to cease.

Worship needs to be taken outside the four walls of the church. Worship needs to be taken into the world where the plague is running rampant. Our homes should be free of the plague. The Bible says, “No plague shall come nigh your dwelling.” We need to stand as a barrier, as a defense, as a dam that stops the onslaught of Satan. But the strength that comes to be that defense only comes from God.

A person can no more be a worshiper because someone beside him is a worshiper than a person can be saved because they are standing next to someone who is saved.

II. The Difference Between Moses and the Children of Israel

Psalm 103:7:

He (God) made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel.

Moses knew the *ways* of God but the children of Israel only knew His *acts*.

Psalm 95:10:

Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways:

Knowing God's ways is not reserved for some exclusive person or group of people. God wants every one of His children to know His ways. God's door of worship is open to anyone who will come.

Moses and a few others learned the heartbeat of God. They entered the tabernacle, worshiped God in spirit and in truth, and learned God's ways.

III. God's Attributes Displayed Through His Names

The attributes of God can be discovered through His names. He is Jehovah Jirah, the Provider. He is Jehovah Shalom, our peace. He is Jehovah Sabaoth, the Lord of hosts—the Captain of God's army. He is Jehovah Rapha, our Healer. Through every name for "God" found in Scripture, one of His attributes is revealed. We find in God's Word that when a name is given, an altar is built. With each name given to God, we should build an altar of worship. We should not take Him for granted, nor should we ignore His many attributes. Rather, we need to stop and think about the fact that God is the One who supplies our every need. When we begin to reflect on it, our heart should be filled with worship toward Him. We need to take time to reflect upon the fact that God is our Healer and worship Him. We need to meditate on the truth that God is our Protector and then worship Him for His protection.

IV. The New and Living Way

Each time we join together for a church service, we should come prepared to worship. But more often than not, instead of having our hearts prepared for worship, we come with the cares of life or distractions in our soul or the influence of the world.

Hebrews 10:19-20:

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,

By a new and living way...

In the Old Testament, the "holiest" was a place where only the high priest could enter. However, under the new covenant, the door to the "holiest place" is open to all believers who will enter in. We enter in through the blood of Jesus Christ!

The New Testament is the “*new and living way.*” The old way was the way of the law and was a dead way. The law ministered death and condemnation because the law could not give life. Neither could sacrifices give life. The law, which seemingly gave life, could not give life. Only the Holy Spirit could give life. The purpose of the law was to point to the One who could bring life, and that was Jesus Christ Himself.

Today, we have been given a “*new and living way.*” God has given us His eternal life and we have been given a new covenant through the shed blood of Jesus Christ!

Hebrews 8:6:

But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.

We have been given a covenant established on better promises than the Old Testament saints.

Hebrews 10:20-22:

By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh;

And having an high priest over the house of God;

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith...

Again, God’s presence is available to all who will draw near and enter in and not to just an exclusive few.

Once we enter in, God wants us to draw near having knowledge of Him. We should not draw near in ignorance of His Word, but instead, in full assurance of His Word, filled with faith.

V. Come to God With a Clean Conscience

...having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience

God does not want us to come to Him with sins of the soul. In other words, inward sins like jealousy, bitterness, and hatred. He wants us to be clean of every sin and our conscience to be pure.

We can be forgiven of sin, but the memory of that sin can try to rise up. Often, we may try to enter into the Lord’s presence, and our mind begins working, “I remember what I did. It was really bad. I hope God isn’t

holding that against me,” and the devil uses those thoughts to try to torment us. But the moment we confess our sin, God not only forgives the sin, He forgets it! He throws it into the sea of forgetfulness and He will never remember it again!

...and our bodies washed with pure water.

We can come to the Lord cleansed in our spirit, soul, and body through the blood of Jesus Christ.

VI. The Categories of Man

The book of 1 Corinthians describes man as being in several different categories. The first category is the natural man. This refers to an individual who is an unbeliever—one who has never received Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. The unbeliever is not invited into the presence of God.

On earth, only believers have the privilege of worshiping God, but there are two categories of believers: the carnal man and the spiritual man.

1 Corinthians 3:1:

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.

The doorway into the presence of God is the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who have accepted Him have been cleansed by that same blood that was shed and are able to come through the veil into the holiest place.

The majority of people who attend Bible-believing churches are believers who are either carnal or spiritual. You cannot distinguish between the carnal and the spiritual believer simply by looking at a person's face. But there are two who do know—the Lord and you! You know on the inside whether or not you are in fellowship with the Lord. Again, the door stands open and you can enter into worship, but some will first need to ask God to forgive them so they can truly enter into the Lord's presence through worship. If you try to come into God's presence with sin in your life, you come with hindrances and although you may lift your hands, speak with tongues, and sing with a loud voice, you are just wasting your time. You may ask, “How do I quit wasting my time?” Simply use 1 John 1:9. Ask God to forgive you and get back into fellowship with Him!

VII. When You Stand Praying, Forgive

Many believers love to quote Mark 11:23: *“For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.”*

Most believers also like to quote Mark 11:24: *“Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.”*

But often, these same believers forget about Mark 11:25: *“And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”*

Psalm 66:18 says, *“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.”* Can you imagine anything more foolish than to pray for an hour and God not hearing you because of the iniquity that is in your heart? What an utter waste of time! Time is precious and God does not want us to waste it! But often, when a believer has sin in his life, he will do things that even have the appearance of spirituality but in reality are works of the flesh. They begin thinking, “Well, I’ve prayed for an hour. That should count for something. I have lifted my hands and my voice. Surely God is taking note of my good works!”

The same unforgiveness that hinders us in prayer is the same unforgiveness that hinders us in worship. We must walk in forgiveness toward others. If we do not forgive, all of our prayers and attempts to worship the Lord are a complete waste of time!

VIII. Hindrances to Worship

A. A Lack of Knowledge

When we come into God’s presence, we must come with a heart filled with faith. Faith comes from knowledge of the Word of God. A lack of knowledge will hinder us from truly enjoying worship.

In the Old Testament, David brought the ark of the covenant into the nation of Israel and into Jerusalem with a lack of knowledge. He carried the ark improperly by carrying it on a cart when God had given instruction for rods to be run through the ark and for the priests to carry it on their shoulders. Because of David’s lack of knowledge as to how to carry the ark, a man ended up dying when he tried to steady the ark.

Your lack of knowledge can affect innocent people around you. God will forgive us for the lack of knowledge, but the further we walk with Him, the more accountable He will expect us to be. God's desire is that we continue to grow in our knowledge of His Word.

Often, people will try to separate worship from the study of God's Word, but they cannot be separated. Whenever you study God's Word, you are worshiping. The word "worship" actually means, "face to face kissing with God." We should not treat the study of God's Word lightly because again, it is a form of worship.

In true worship, you always leave that place of worship changed. Not only is this true of worshiping God, it is also true of satanic worship. It is also true of the world. You will become more and more like the one you worship!

Every time you spend time in God's Word, you become more like God Himself.

2 Corinthians 3:18:

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

The phrase "...open face" actually means "unveiled face." The entire essence of 2 Corinthians 3 is the comparison of life under the law versus life under the new covenant. The more of God's Word we learn, the more we're changed into the image of God and the easier it becomes to worship Him. A lack of knowledge will hinder our ability to worship the Lord. God is seeking worshipers who will put Him first place in their lives.

B. Pride

1 Corinthians 1:29:

That no flesh should glory in his presence.

Notice, this verse doesn't say that flesh cannot come into His presence; it says no flesh shall *glory* in His presence. Pride always lifts itself above others—as being better than others. God hates pride and the arrogant heart. He hates a haughty spirit. He loves a humble heart and promises to exalt the humble person in due time.

If there was anyone that might deserve to be proud, it was Abraham. God had blessed him above all the people of the earth in his day. Possessions?

He had more. Wealth? He had more. Power? He had more. Intimacy with God? He had more. In fact, Abraham walked so intimately with God, he was called “a friend of God.” Abraham was a man who humbled himself before God. When he prayed for Lot and for the deliverance of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham referred to himself as “dust and ashes.” He realized he was nothing without God. If we have pride in our lives, we must repent. Pride makes it impossible to worship God.

C. An Independent Attitude

John 15:5:

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. Without the life that comes from the vine, the branches could not produce. We are totally dependent upon the vine. Without the Lord, we can do nothing. An independent attitude will keep us from truly worshiping God.

The way to stay attached to the vine is by remaining in fellowship with God. When we begin to have an independent attitude, we cut ourselves off from the vine that feeds us.

D. A Critical Attitude

We need to be removed from a critical attitude. The Word of God repeatedly warns against judging others. A critical attitude is really a manifestation of pride. When someone is critical, they are setting themselves up as a judge to look down on and speak evil of other people. The only person we have a right to judge is ourselves. The Bible tells us that we are to examine ourselves. But more often than not, we spend time judging others than we do ourselves.

Matthew 7:1-2:

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged: and with what measure you mete, it will be measured to you again.

And why behold thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but consider not the beam that is in you own eye?

Jesus is saying, “How dare you judge another person. How dare you criticize them when they have only a splinter in their eye but you have a log in your eye!”

By criticizing others, you have reaped back a good measured, pressed down, shaken together, and running over splinter! Whatever you sow, you will reap. That is why it is so important to sow love! When you judge others, you are in worse condition than any sin they might be participating in.

Romans 2:1:

Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whosoever you are that judges: for wherein you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you that judge do the same things.

The next time you feel the temptation to run someone down, remember—you have been guilty of the same thing. You need to treat others the same way the Lord has treated you. You need to sow mercy rather than bitterness. The Lord said that we are to be merciful as He is merciful. Quit judging others!

Hebrews 3:16-18:

For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses.

But with whom was he grieved forty years? Was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness?

And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not?

Those who could not enter into rest were those who were in unbelief. The root of criticism is unbelief. When you truly believe God and His Word, you will not criticize others. Instead, you will begin to see them through the eyes of God's love and you will begin to sow love into their lives.

E. Apathy

Apathy is laziness. Many people know what they need to do but they simply won't do it! I have counseled with people having marriage problems. They know what they need to do to make their marriage work. I have actually had people tell me they know what to do and then say, "I don't want to do what it takes." You begin giving a scripture to these people and they finish it for you. I'll ask them, "Why don't you do what the Word is telling you?" and their response is, "I just don't want to do it." Apathy will stop you from entering into the goodness of God. Ministry is active.

Ecclesiastes 10:18:

By much slothfulness the building decays; and through idleness of the hands the house drops through.

The slothful will always miss the blessings of God but the diligent will always find them!

F. Impatience

Hebrews 6:12:

That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

You may be thinking, “There are things in my life that I have been believing for that still have not manifested.” Perhaps you have become concerned and tempted to think they will *never* come to pass. If you have been doubting that God’s promises will come to pass, ask God to forgive you for your impatience. It is not for the farmer to tell the seed when to sprout. Know that your promise is planted in the ground of faith and you may not see it yet, but it is producing. We will *reap* if we faint not!

You may come into a worship service and begin thinking, “I have been praying and believing for my uncle to be born again for such a long time. I have quoted scriptures, I have prayed for laborers to be sent across his path, I have done everything I can think of and he doesn’t look any closer to receiving Jesus than when I started praying for him! In fact, he looks like he’s even farther away from God than ever!” While everyone else is enjoying the presence of God, you are missing out because of your impatience!

James 1:4:

But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

G. Legalism

Legalism is a subtle hindrance. We can come to church proud of all the good we have done during the week. We might say to the Lord, “God, I won four souls! Four! Just count them! Not only that, I laid hands on a person the other day and they were healed! Aren’t you so proud of me? I bet You’re really proud of my works! You really need me, don’t You?” But Isaiah 64:6 says, “...*all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.*” Self-

righteousness and legalism will keep you from truly entering into the presence of the Lord in worship.

The purpose of worship is not to draw attention to *our* works, but to draw attention to the works of God! You did not win those people to the Lord. You may argue with that, but you did not win them! The Holy Spirit gave you the words to speak. The Holy Spirit wrote the Bible so you would have something to preach. If the Holy Spirit had not drawn them, all of your words would have been worthless. Regardless of how the Lord uses us, all of the glory goes back to Him!

H. Worldliness

We cannot escape the world's system. We are surrounded by it daily. But the Bible says even though we are *in* this world, we are not to be *of* the world. We are surrounded by human viewpoint all week, but man's ideas are always opposed to God's. The way man obtains money is opposed to God's way. Man's way of rising in business, position, and authority is always opposed to God's plan. Man says, "Pull a few strings, smooth talk the boss, juggle the books, tell a few lies." Man may rise in power this way but God's way says to humble yourself under the mighty hand God and He will exalt you in due time. God says when you have an opportunity to take the best seat, take the low seat and He will exalt you. Watch God work for you.

1 John 2:15:

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

What you do is always a product of what you think. You can have worldly, lustful ideas inside you. The Bible calls this "worldly" and "carnal." Worldliness will prevent you from entering into the fullness of worship.

I. Unforgiveness

Unforgiveness will always separate us from worship—from face to face communion with God.

Isaiah 59:1-2:

Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear:

But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.

When you come to church with unforgiveness in your heart, ask the Lord to forgive you.

Mark 11:25:

And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.

Matthew 6:15:

But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

If we are unwilling to ask forgiveness from our brother, then God must stand in unforgiveness toward us. If I regard iniquity in my heart, God will not hear me. God desires that we ask His forgiveness.

1 John 1:9:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

J. Wrong Priorities

Another name for wrong priorities is idolatry. You may say, "But Pastor, I don't get down in front of wood and stone and bow down before idols!" That may be true, but how many hours do you spend in front of the television? How much time do you spend reading magazines or newspapers? How much time do you spend participating in your favorite hobby? Our priorities can be so misplaced. God becomes jealous. We may say, "Hey God, I've got 25 minutes on Sunday I'm going to squeeze you in so I can get back to my computer to get my ledger sheets balanced." When we're trying to fit God into our schedule because other things are more important, this is idolatry. You cannot truly enter into worship if your priorities are not right.

VII. The Importance of Priorities

The number one priority in your life should be God and the things surrounding your relationship with God. This includes study of the Word, prayer, time with Him, church attendance. Nothing should be allowed to

separate you from these things. There is no excuse that can be given for God not being first place in your life if you are born again.

Matthew 6:33:

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Exodus 20:3

You shall have no other gods before Me.

Matthew 4:8-9:

Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."

Whenever things come before God, you have in essence fallen down to worship the devil and the world's system. Our priorities are important to God.

The number one priority in your life is the attention you give to God. Without God, your family will fall apart, your business will fail, your friendships will not be blessed. God is the glue that holds everything else together.

Your second priority is your family—your husband, your wife, your children.

Your third priority is your job.

Finally, are "things"—possessions...hobbies.

So often, people have their priorities completely reversed. They have put "things" in the number one slot and God falls in last place. We get the mentality, "Well, if we don't have nice things, what will people think?"

There is absolutely nothing wrong with having nice things. There's nothing wrong with having a nice car but the "things" should simply be tools to display what God has done in our lives. When people walk away from us they should be like the Queen of Sheba. She was not impressed by all of the things Solomon possessed; she was impressed with the God that he served. When she walked away, she said, "Surely the half wasn't told to me of the wisdom." She was impressed with the wisdom Solomon had

been given by God. She recognized it was supernatural wisdom that brought the wealth! When people leave our presence they should be saying to themselves, “I want the God they serve.”

If the things you possess are more important than God, if your job or even your family are more important, your fellowship with God will be hindered. Again, God is a jealous God and wants to be number one in our lives!

Make a commitment to God today saying, “God, if You are seeking for one who will put you first place, search no more. If Your eyes are roaming to and fro, here I am! I am a true worshiper. I want to worship You in spirit and in truth because I know that is what will carry me into eternity. The car I drive won’t get me there. The house I own won’t get me there. None of my possessions will get me there. It is only my relationship with You that I will carry into eternity.”

We should want to be like Abraham. Although he had many possessions, he didn’t hold to them tightly because he looked for a city with real foundations whose builder and maker was God. That is where true home is located. What we have stored up in heaven will last for an eternity!