

Restoring . . .



WORSHIP

In order to restore that which is true, and according to the word of God, we sometimes must be somewhat negative in our approach and discovery of that which is according to the word of God. This principle of discovery is certainly needed in our investigation of how we worship God. Because worship must come from within our hearts, and not be pumped in from outside stimulus, we must always check ourselves on this matter. Therefore, it is not negative to be sincere about how God is worshipped.

In recognition of the fact that we who have obeyed the gospel, cannot afterward live a sinless life, some have invented a ritual of Sunday “worship” laws to obey in order to atone for their sins of the past week. These sins were supposedly committed between the closing prayer last Sunday morning and the opening prayer the following Sunday. Once the worship performances are completed, then some believe that they have a saved—restored—their relationship with God. Our Sunday ceremonial laws of identity, therefore, can supposedly be performed within a window of time on Sunday morning in order to legally restore our relationship with God.

This belief and behavior have given rise to the concept of “the hour of worship,” which concept is nowhere found in the New Testament. The belief, nevertheless, presents a problem,

especially in view of the fact that Jesus said that His people would worship **anytime** and **anywhere** (See Jn 4:21-24).

If we go deeper into this concept of worship, some surprising conclusions are discovered. After successfully performing the required ceremonies during the “hour of worship,” or exhausting oneself in an experiential euphoria of entertaining “worship,” the attending adherent is supposedly released from a sense of guilt over sins that were committed throughout the past week—at least one goes away from such an assembly feeling better. In order to validate the existence of this supposed “worship atonement” through “worshipful” performances, the “hour of worship” is opened with an “opening prayer” and concluded with a “closing prayer.” The performance of the ceremonies between the two prayers, it is believed, becomes an “offering” of atonement for all sins committed outside the “worship hour.” After the “closing prayer,” therefore, the “faithful” worshiper, if he or she has specifically and meritoriously performed the “acts of worship,” or exhausted oneself in a chaotic euphoric experience, can supposedly walk away from the assembly with a reassuring sense of having restored his or her righteousness. By doing such it is presumed that one has returned to being a faithful member of the church.

Subsequently, after such a performance, some have convinced themselves with a false sense of “faithfulness” because they have performed the “worship” ceremonies on Sunday morning. In other words, there is no need for grace between the opening and closing prayers on Sunday morning simply because supposed “laws of atonement” are being performed by which one is self-justified in obedience to the supposed “laws of worship.” We resort to grace only after the closing prayer. We do so because we have led ourselves to believe that our “faithful” performance of our ceremonies of law between the opening and closing prayers have atoned for all our sins outside the “hour of worship.”

In view of the preceding belief and behavior in reference to establishing a legal identity of the worship of the church, and the faithful obedience thereof, we have inadvertently

established a legal identity of the church that is based on law, not grace. **By focusing on the merit of our worship performances, we are forced to move grace aside during the performance of law within the “hour of worship.”** However, the problem with this belief is that we cannot substitute some meritorious system of “worship laws” as atonement for our sins, even if we define the performed acts to be “worship.”

By being obedient to a catechism of worship ceremonies, we might presumptuously declare that we have been made perfect in our worship obedience, and thus justified before God because of our faithful worship attendance. But worship can never be considered a behavioral performance for the atonement of our sins. To think so is only a deception brought on by a spirit of self-righteousness. If we feel righteous after the performance of our worship ceremonies, or the exhilaration that may come from a well-performed concert, **then we might lean toward being self-righteous because of what we performed or experienced during the “hour of worship.”** But to “feel” such is to marginalize the grace of God and ignore the righteousness of God that comes to us through the gospel of the cross.

Such self-righteousness is contrary to the very nature of the people of God as revealed in the New Testament (Compare Rm 10:1-3). Such is contrary to the faith of Jesus whereby He took Himself to the cross for us. His gospel action at the cross was a result of His faith (See Gl 2:16). We would never, therefore, substitute the expression of our faith in worship as a substitute for His faith to make us righteous through the cross. **Any sense of self-righteousness because of the performance of our faith is an attack against the righteousness that comes to us through the Lord Jesus Christ.**

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