

Galatians 4:8-20

What Do You Worship?

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines “worship” this way; “To honor and love as a deity,” or “to regard with ardent or adoring esteem or devotion.”

Just a little over a year ago we did a four-part series on worship entitled “True Worship.” In that series we put out this proposition: Everybody worships something. Everybody is a worshiper.

When we started that series we gave this basic definition of worship: “Worship is declaring what matters most to you and responding to it.”

Or as the dictionary puts it, “Ardent or adoring esteem or devotion.”

Now, not everybody agrees with the idea that we’re all worshippers. I’m always interested in what those who hold to a different world view than mine are thinking.

For instance, what does an atheist think about the idea that we’re all worshippers?

This is from atheistempire.com: *“If that is true (that everyone worships), (then) everyone is a polytheist. Theists care just as much about those things that atheists care about. If the atheists’ reactions to (for example) their families amount to worship then so do the theists’.”*

I’d agree. A lot of Christians claim to be monotheists, but the real truth is God isn’t the only object of their worship.

Austin Cline, Regional Director for the Council for Secular Humanism, in an article entitled 10 myths about atheism, *“There is very often a redefinition of “worship,” making it mean something as trivial as “intense attention.” Such tactics truly reveal that a person is grasping for straws: just because you can identify the one most important thing in your life doesn’t meant that you actually “worship” it.”*

“It is a sign of real desperation when someone deliberately undercuts their own religious beliefs and commitment in order to score false rhetorical points in an argument.”

In other words, he's saying we devalue the meaning of the word "worship" when we apply it to anything other than God.

The problem for Mr. Kline is, that he, as an atheist, doesn't want to be accused of worship.

The truth is that we are all worshippers. And sometimes even Christians get caught up in the trap of false worship.

Our verse by verse study of Paul's letter to the Galatians has brought us to Chapter 4 and verse 8. **Turn pg 1035**

The Bible tells us that Jesus said this about Satan, "*...he is a liar and the father of it.*" All the way back in the Garden of Eden Satan lied. He said, "You can't believe God. God's trying to keep things back from you."

See, we all worship. It's what we were created to do. But Satan does everything in His power to draw you away from worshipping the True and living God.

The churches in the region of Asia Minor, known as Galatia, got off to a great start. The Galatians were Gentile people with no exposure to the Bible or to God's Old Testament law.

Paul was a first century missionary who visited Galatia and told everyone who'd listen about Jesus Christ. He told them how They were separated from their Creator because of their sins and how Jesus came to pay for sin.

A number of Galatians believed, churches were formed, and God was worshiped in spirit and in truth.

Satan hates it when God is worshipped. Satan's ultimate goal is to draw worship away from God.

So as soon as Paul moves on Satan stirs up trouble. It comes in the form of teachers who bring a confusing message of works to the Galatians.

This is always the break point when it comes to God's message of forgiveness. God says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith..." Satan's message is, "God will only accept you if you earn your way into His kingdom."

Now, see the difference? God's way depends totally on His work so He gets all the credit. Christ died for our sins. He gets the glory. He gets the worship.

Satan's way is to do something. We can earn forgiveness. We can deserve a spot in the kingdom. So in the end, we get the glory that God deserves.

These false teachers had come from Jerusalem and told the Galatians that faith in Jesus was important, but so was keeping God's Law.

It's like the Islamic teaching of the scales. Every true follower of Islam believes that if he can accumulate more good works than bad he can tip the scales in his favor.

He has to have faith in Allah, but he has to earn his salvation.

The Quran says: *Then those whose scales are heavy, they are successful. And those whose scales are light are those who lose their souls, in hell abiding, the fire burns their faces and they are glum therein.*

Here's a quote from an Islamic publication called, "Introducing Islam to Non-Muslims." *"Muslims believe that people are born free of sin. It is only after they reach the age of puberty, and it is only after they commit sins that they are to be charged for their mistakes. No one is responsible for or can take the responsibility for the sins of others."*

Islam talks about faith, but in reality it's a religion of works.

Most religions are like that including this false faith the Galatians had believed.

The letter to the Galatians is Paul's attempt to steer them back to the truth.

So far Paul has explained where he got his message of grace. God is the one who saved him out of a life that was dedicated to the destruction of Christianity. He's explained the purpose of God's law which was to protect and direct Israel until the coming of Jesus Christ.

He's explained that we're to live as Christians who are free, and mature, and are responsible in Christ.

As Paul now points the Galatians back to the way things were before they trusted Christ, we'll see the first of three concepts in this passage:

I. Every Person Worships in Some Way

Read 8

"When you didn't even know who God was, you were slaves. You were in bondage and you didn't even realize it."

In Romans chapter 1, the Bible says *"...the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.*

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse."

God holds all the people of the world accountable for a basic knowledge of God. The creation shows that there is a personal intelligent creator who deserves our worship.

The thing is, people reject that knowledge, and the worship that belongs to God gets redirected.

In Hinduism there are 300 million gods and goddesses that command worship. In some of our universities man is worshipped.

But neither Hanuman the monkey god or human intellect is really God by nature.

The Galatians had worshipped idols in their past. Everything from the fertility goddess, Diana of the Ephesians to Bacchus, the god of wine.

Epimenides, the philosopher said that in the city of Athens it was easier to find a god than men.

What does God's word have to say about idols and idolatry? I Corinthians 10:20 *"Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons."*

Idols are nothing but hunks of wood and stone. But behind those idols, and the false worship they represent, stand demonic forces.

How about the worship of man in humanism?

The original humanist manifesto, which was signed by many of the most prominent and influential people in government and education in the US, including John Dewey (the Father of modern American education) said,

"Humanists regard the universe as self-existing and not created. Humanism believes that man is a part of nature and that he has emerged as a result of a continuous process."

"Humanism asserts that the nature of the universe depicted by modern science makes unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human values."

Romans 1 in the Bible says, *"...because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools."*

In the book of Revelation, which gives us a panorama of the events of the future, we're told in chapter 13 that Satan empowers a world ruler known as the antichrist. His mark is called the mark of the beast, is described by the number 666.

Six is the number of man in the Bible. It's like Satan is saying by that mark, "Man, Man, Man." Satan wants the worship and he gets it by promoting the worship of a human being.

So these Galatians served as slaves those who weren't really gods at all. Whether they bowed down before idols or cynically declared themselves atheists, the Galatians were slaves.

Every person worships in some way. Everyone has their gods to whom they show allegiance.

Someone today who accepts the humanistic philosophy of our society isn't free, but a slave. People think they can rid themselves of God and His moral standards and then they'll be free.

But Jesus said, "If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed." That's the only way. Anything else is slavery: to false religion, to humanism, to sin, to self.

Once again, the Bible is showing us that it really does matter what we believe. God says it matters.

I. Every Person Worships in Some Way

II. Worship Without God 's Truth Is Bondage

Read vs 9

You Galatians know God. You got to know God in faith, but not by your own ability. God worked in you through the Holy Spirit. The knowledge you have of God is because God worked in your life.

How is it that once you were slaves, now you're free, but you want to go back into bondage?

No one who was set free from slavery would choose to go back.

Now here's what he's saying; The Law of Moses formerly held the Jews in bondage. God had a clear and definite purpose for that bondage. As we saw last week, God's law kept them under guard as their tutor to bring them to Christ.

the Law of God is perfect but it can't bring forgiveness because human beings can't keep it.

So the regulations that the Law spelled out, about what you could eat, what you could drink, how you were to worship, actually held the Jewish people in bondage.

The Galatian people in their pagan religions were in the same boat.

One was Satan enslaving people to blind people from the truth, the other was God enslaving people to point them to the truth.

But Jesus Christ changed all that. He set the Galatians free from the bondage of false worship just like He set Israel free from the bondage of the law.

And now, amazingly, the Galatians are listening to people who are telling them to keep all the OT law. To put them selves under bondage. Not under the bondage to pagan religion, they knew better than that, but what appeared to be spiritual, the law of Moses.

Satan is the master religionist. And his most enslaving, deceptive religion of all is based on a false understanding of the Bible.

Catch this now. It wasn't hard for the Galatians to see how wrong their paganism was with all of its phony gods and goddesses when they were confronted with the Bible.

When the contrast was between the living Word of God and idols of wood and stone they could see the truth.

But when the contrast was between the statements of Paul about salvation by grace through faith, and the OT Scriptures, which they misread as teaching salvation by works, they were blind to the truth.

This is where Satan really has a field day. Look at all the "Christian religions" we have today. Every one of them, from the cults to the big denominations, is rooted in some aspect of the Mosaic Law.

They're back there at the "weak and beggarly" elements. The shadows rather than the substance, which is Christ.

They have a human priesthood, they keep holy days, they call their buildings the sanctuary or the house of God, they tell people not to question what they're told, they say a person is saved by keeping the 10 commandments.

So here were the Galatians Christians giving up the power of the gospel for the weakness of the Law and the wealth of the Gospel for the poverty of the law.

The law of Moses never made anyone spiritually rich or powerful. It wasn't designed to do that. The law revealed man's weakness and spiritual bankruptcy.

No wonder Paul wept. Worship without God is bondage. Whether its paganism, humanism, or a Christian works religion. The end result is still the same.

It's only the freedom of entrusting your salvation to the person of Jesus Christ that delivers a person from bondage.

Read vs 10

Does that mean that it's wrong for us to celebrate Easter on the 27th of this month? What about commemorating Christ's birth at Christmas? What about any day or season that's important to us spiritually?

Not necessarily. If in our observation of the day we express our liberty in Christ then it can be a spiritual blessing. We're free to celebrate all the special days we want.

But if we observe special day with a slave-like obedience, then we're sinning. If we do it thinking it will put us in a better standing with God or help earn our way to heaven then we're sinning.

If you come to church thinking "I have to do this so God will like me, or so I can work off some sins I committed during the week" we've turned freedom into bondage.

That was what was happening in Galatia. That's what made Paul write verse 11. Martin Luther said, "These words of Paul breath tears."

Read 11

Sometimes we can forget that we're doing stuff for God and get really discouraged.

A pastor can feel like a failure if his church doesn't grow. A Sunday school teacher can feel demoralized if her class never seems like they're listening. A person who has a home Bible study can feel dejected if the neighbors who promised to come are no shows.

We can feel like a failure or start feeling sorry for ourselves.

Serving God isn't about us. If we feel bad, it should be for the people who are missing out on God's truth. Not ourselves and our successes or failures.

Paul wasn't saying, "Oh no. I must be a failure. These people aren't listening to me."

His concern was for their spiritual welfare. Serving God's about the glory of God and the benefit of others.

What he's saying is this: "If I did all this, and all I accomplished was to get you out of one type of bondage into another, then my work's in vain. I've just been spinning my wheels."

See:

- I. Every Person Worships*
- II. Worship Without God Is Always Bondage*
- III. True Worship Leads To Christ Likeness*

Paul's been kind of tough on these people. It's because he loves them, but he's still been tough. Now he lets down his guard and shows he has a pastor's heart.

Verse 12

He's on his knees pleading: "I was once zealous for the Law and works but I laid aside the law to take my place with you Gentiles. Now I'm begging you, take your place with me. Be free as I am free."

Here's a real lesson for us. Paul became a friend of sinners.

These Galatians were as corrupt as you come. They practiced homosexuality, drunkenness, incest, prostitution, even in their religious worship.

These are all things that would repel a godly person. I'm sure Paul was repulsed by their sins. But he still became their friend and reached out to them with the gospel.

He became as they were. Not in the sin, but he reached out to them in their everyday lives.

That's a hard balance to maintain isn't it?

Joe Aldrich, in the book Lifestyle Evangelism says, "Jesus ministered to the harlots, touched the untouchable lepers, and scandalized the religious community by mixing with riff raff. He was right where the beer cans and poker chips were present."

"Jesus was effective because of his radical identification with the world, and at the same time his radical difference from it."

That was Paul's strategy. Not compromising what he knew from the Bible, but willing to enter another culture and build relationships without rejecting people.

And it paid off in his ministry. **Read vs 13-15**

We don't know exactly what Paul suffered from, but apparently he had severe problems with his eyes that effected his appearance.

The word "Despise" means "to regard with utter contempt." "Reject" is the translation of a word which literally means to "spit out."

In the ancient Near East, people would spit after coming in contact with a disease or illness which was repulsive. Paul's point can hardly be missed: he was a mess, a sickening sight. There was no human attractiveness in his appearance.

Yet the Galatians received him as they would receive Jesus Christ.

He came humbly. He came prayerfully. He came with the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. And he didn't judge them. He shared with them the unsearchable riches of Christ.

So here's the question. **Read vs 16**

Have I become the bad guy because I'm telling you what you need to hear instead of what you want to hear?

Are you like the woman who smashed the mirror because it showed she had wrinkles?

To be told that you can't do anything to save yourself, or make yourself right with God is a blow to pride. People are always ready to accept some works system and reject grace.

But a preacher can't tell people what they want to hear at the expense of truth.

So Paul says, "Am I your enemy now? Let me tell you something about enemies."

Read vs 17-18

The Judaizers were the perfect picture of a cult group. They were so much like a cult group today.

Their goal was to build a wall around the Galatians. To show care for them, not for their good, but to capture them for their group.

That's the cult mentality. Isolate people from the truth of the gospel and make them feel totally dependent on the cult as their source of truth.

Our goal is to introduce people to Jesus Christ and equip them to be His devoted followers. Not followers of us or Faith Community Church, but followers of Christ.

The reformer John Calvin wrote, "If ministers wish to do any good, let them labor to form Christ, to to form themselves in their followers."

Read 19-20

Here's the heart of a godly man. He says, "You know what I feel like with you guys? I feel like a mother that's gone back into labor pains after she's given birth."

Now I don't have any first hand experience but I've been told that labor pains can be pretty tough. Guys what you don't want to do in the minutes following the delivery of the baby is talk to your wife about when you want to have the next one. Don't even kid about it.

Now think about a woman delivering the baby and then going into labor all over again.

Paul says we've been all through this. You trusted Jesus Christ as the way to heaven, and now we're back to the birth process again.

I'd like to show up face to face. I'm a little confused right now. The word translated "doubts" in the NKJV means literally "to be without a way to go." NIV and NASB have it right when they translate it, "I am perplexed about you." Everyone worships. It's what God created us to do and if we don't worship Him, we'll worship something or someone.

The atheist, the materialist, the humanist, the animist, the Buddhist, the Hindu, the Muslim, the Catholic, the Protestant, the Mormon - they all worship.

But worship without the truth of God is bondage.

It doesn't matter how much a person talks about God, or tries to deny God, worship without God's truth is slavery, not freedom.

One atheist, trying to deny that atheists worship says, *"if we keep in mind the fact that theists hold some things in equal regard as atheists, what happens is that both atheists and theists - even Christians - become blatant polytheists."*

You know, I have to agree. Sometimes Christians have a divided allegiance. Sometimes God isn't the true focus of our worship because we're so focused on so many other things. Sometimes we do try to worship God and self at the same time.

True worship results in Christ likeness. True worship sets aside pride, ego, and self and in humility puts the focus on Christ. That leads to a life where Christ is on the throne. Jesus Christ is preeminent.

What kind of worshipper are you today? Enslaved or free?

Known of God or alienated from God?

Paul's heart in this passage is merely a reflection of God's heart.

In God's heart is a holy hatred for sin coupled with an infinite love for sinners that all came together at the cross.

Are you worshipping God in spirit and in truth? We all worship something. When we worship anything but God our worship is empty. When we worship the living God who saves us by His grace and makes us part of His family our lives are full of meaning.

Our lives are full of meaning because this is what we're created for. Worshipping God is our ultimate purpose,