

life group study guide

INDESCRIBABLE

Isaiah 58: True Worship vs. False Worship



It is possible to worship God while driving along the highway or sitting in a baseball park. But if we raise the question of statistical probability, the worship of God is scarcely as frequent in those places as in houses built in his honor. There is the story of the father who said, "Come on, we can sing hymns on the beach," to which the little girl replied, "But we won't, will we?" George Hedley, The Superstitions of the Irreligious *But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.* (John 4:23-24)

Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. (1 John 4:20)

Introduction

What do you think of when you hear the word "worship"?

In your opinion, does everyone (Christian or not) worship someone or something?

What is the importance of corporate worship? (see Heb 10:23-25)

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Read John 4:19-24

Jesus' discussion at the well with a woman turns to worship. She asks Jesus specifically about the place of worship.

- How does Jesus answer her?
- What myths does he dispel?

In light of Isaiah 58, let's examine further what it means to worship "in spirit and truth."

Is 58:3 expresses the frustration (by Israel) that their fast does not bring the favor of God they desire.

In Is 58: 3-5 God explains the shortcomings of their efforts through fasting.

- What does God list as the reasons for their ineffectual fast?
- How can doing a good thing (like fasting) be a negative in God's eyes?

In Matthew 23, Jesus lists the many sins of the Pharisees. In verse 3, he commends what they teach, but warns against following the actions of the Pharisees (hypocrisy).

What does Jesus point out with regard to the Pharisees and

1. Rules and expectations of others (v4)
2. Motivation for good deeds (v5)
3. Humility (vs 6-7, 11-12)
4. Titles and hierarchy (vs 8-10)
5. Creating a stumbling block for others (v 13)
6. Greed (v14)
7. False teaching (v15)
8. Improper priorities and misplaced honor (vs 16-22)
9. Picking and choosing which of God's commands to obey (vs 23-24)
10. Concern for appearances and the opinion of others (vs 26-28)
11. Comparing yourself to others as a measure of righteousness (vs 29-33)

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Before we join Jesus in the condemnation of the Pharisees, can you see yourself in anything on the list for Jesus' rebuke?

In Matthew 23, the charges against the Pharisees stem from their hypocrisy and "blindness".

- How can we (individually and corporately) avoid these sinful conditions today?
- How can we be made aware of our own spiritual blind spots?

The world throws the hypocrisy charge at Christians (as individuals) and the church (as an institution) today.

- Is there some merit to the charge?
- In the midst of these charges, what can we do to point people to the "Spirit and Truth"?
- How can we, as sinful humans, speak the truth in the midst of our own sinfulness without succumbing to (or being silenced by) the charge of hypocrisy?

Back to Is 58; in vs 6-7 God tells His people what He desires in a fast.

- What does God list as things He desires for His people to do?
- Jesus explains this further in an exchange with the Pharisees (Matt 9:10-13) that ends with the statement, "But go and learn what this means: 'I desire compassion and not sacrifice,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."
 - What does this statement mean?
 - How do we apply it in our daily lives?
 - How does this teaching by Jesus in Matthew relate with Isaiah 58?
 - Are we defined by the unsaved world more by what we don't do (sacrifice) than what we do (compassion)?

Is 58:8-14 lists some conditional promises for obedience to God's commands.

- What are the promised rewards in these verses?
- With regard to answered prayer (v 9), 1 Peter 3:7 also gives a command to follow to remove hindrance to prayer. What is this command?
- Which of the Ten Commandments come with a promise?
- Aren't all of God's commands for our benefit?
 - Why do you think some are linked directly to a promise and/or benefit?
 - Is there a cause-and-effect nature to some commands?
 - Can an unbeliever benefit from obeying God's commands?

In Matt 5:23-24 Jesus instructs someone making an offering to first be reconciled with his brother. This is another example of the importance God has placed on relationship between our worship of God and our treatment, relationship and attitude toward others.

The Book of James lists other ways to demonstrate the true nature of our love for God. The five chapters in James are filled with practical ways to be sure we are seeking God in spirit and truth.

In James 1:25-27, we are given a test—both positive and negative—for the "religion" we profess:

- Hypocrisy (v25)
- Uncontrolled speech (v26)
- Care for widows and orphans (vs27)
- Holiness (vs27)

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This list is not exhaustive.

- But how do we balance the call for “sin avoidance” (the negative) with the commands for mercy and kindness (the positives) in reaching a lost world?
- In your opinion, do the positives (actions to alleviate suffering, right injustice) or the negatives (“thou shall not”, abstaining from sinful practices) do more to help advance the kingdom of God?

James 2:14-18

The Bible teaches we are saved by faith alone.

- Why does James link faith and works?
- How does he link faith and works?

How does James point out the difference between faith and belief?

Discussion

Did someone’s (or a church’s) works play a role in your journey to faith in Christ? If so, share some details.

How can your actions (works) through the week enhance your corporate worship on Sunday?

Why do you think God commands us to help the poor (as we have seen in Isaiah 58 and other passages) so often in Scripture? Is this part of worshipping in spirit and truth?