

Count the Worshipers

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“I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, ‘Go and measure the temple of God and the altar and count the worshipers there.’ ” (Revelation 11:1)

The Bible predicts that a series of catastrophic events will soon come upon the world. The world, especially Christians, will be caught off guard. Jesus warns us that these events are beyond anything this world has ever seen. (Matthew 24:21) Though events will be shocking and devastating, nothing will be more alarming and horrifying than the lack of “measuring up” which will come to those who claim to know and worship God.

Webster’s dictionary defines “worship” as an expression of reverence or adoration for deity. Some people associate the term with singing songs or an amount given in offerings; and, these may be acts of worship, but they do not define “true” worship. *True worship is to honor with extravagant love and extreme submission.* We worship God because He is God. Paul best describes this in Romans 12:1: **“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship.”** This requires a daily decision to yield to the work of holiness; an ordering of our lives to live according to God’s Word and His ways. It happens daily as the Holy Spirit molds and conforms us to the image of Christ. We worship God with our lives, by the way that we live, in submission to His authority. (Luke 9:23)

Genesis 4 provides a demonstration of true worship in the choices made by Cain and Abel. When God presented His terms to them, Abel chose to obey God’s terms and God accepted his sacrifice. When Cain brought a sacrifice of his own choosing, God did not accept it. Cain was offended because he expected God to be satisfied with whatever he chose to sacrifice. Cain expected God to lower or change His standard. Had Cain done what was right, God would have accepted his sacrifice. Yet, Cain refused to be under God’s authority. Abel expressed love...Cain expressed defiance.

Revelation 10 and 11 provide the incredible story of how God uses extraordinary measures to present the gospel to the entire world during the last 1335 days of Earth’s history. The eternal gospel includes a call to worship the Creator on His terms. Like Cain and Abel, each person will make his or her own choice. God tells us in advance that He must purge the inner court because anyone can claim to be born again. Before Jesus returns, He will inspect the life of each person to determine if we only have a head knowledge of Him or if submission to do what is right is present. This requires sacrifice. God has given each person the ability to know right from wrong. (Romans 2:13-15) He will also enable us to do what is right if we are willing. His strength is made perfect in our weakness!

God begins the separation process in the inner court because it is where believers worship. He must rid the inner court of imposters to make room for those who have never heard the gospel but are honest-in-heart and will accept His terms and live under His authority. There are many

who will hear, believe, obey, and submit. In the end, everyone will fit into one of two groups: sheep or goats. (Matthew 25; 1 John 3:10)

Christianity as a whole, the group in the inner court, is in trouble. Jesus warns us that **“the love of most will grow cold”** due to the increase of wickedness. (Matthew 24:12) Jesus is referring to people who abandon their faith and turn away. Today, worship has been watered down to mean songs, church attendance, and religious activity. The gospel has been diluted, accountability and submission are missing, and sin is not being challenged. The increase of wickedness that Jesus speaks of in Matthew 24 is in the church. Selfishness, pride, lust, sexual immorality, and other evils of the world have numbed God’s people. Jesus can repeat the words He spoke to Jeremiah **“My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil; they know not how to do good.”** (Jeremiah 4:22) Love for God is missing. (Mark 12:30; John 15:10; 1 John 2:3) Today, people are stimulated weekly with smooth words, arousing music, and socializing rather than studying the teachings of God’s Word. If we possess only head knowledge of God, it leaves us susceptible to hype and emotionalism or bound by our intellect. Consequently, there are many imposters pretending to be Christians in churches today.

The parable of the ten virgins is revealing. They all thought they were ready to meet the bridegroom. They all had lamps. [Bible carrying people. Psalm 119:105] They all looked the same. All attended church and seemed to be ready. However, five virgins were imposters and did not “measure up.” These five women heard four shocking words they never anticipated. **“I don’t know you.”** (Matthew 25:12) They had gone through the motions, believed they were saved, but were not saved. **“But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud . . . unholy, without love, unforgiving . . . lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God — having a form of godliness [outward appearance] but denying its power [to change them]. Have nothing to do with them.”** (2 Timothy 3:1-5, insertions mine)

Our carnal nature will always attempt to pull us away from Christ. Sadly, we have a built-in hostility toward holiness. (Romans 8:7) We are naturally selfish. The power of sin is greater than our deepest resolve and determination. No matter how much we surrender to Christ and walk in the Spirit, we can never, in this life, totally overcome sin. This is depressing. The amazing news is that Jesus is well aware of our depraved state. He has done for us what we could not do for ourselves by paying the price for sin. He *continues* to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves by giving us the grace we need to fight the good fight one day at a time. We must be aware daily of our great need. He will fit us with the humility needed to love Him supremely and to love our neighbor as ourselves. An honest-in-heart person will acknowledge his own deficiency and God’s abundance. (Luke 18:13) His grace is always sufficient! (2 Corinthians 12:9)

How do we keep from losing our resolve and turning away from Christ? Remember Peter’s experience. He thought it impossible to abandon Christ. How do we keep from being like one of the foolish virgins? Having a good start does not mean having a good finish.

We fight the good fight by staying teachable and humble. God wants to reveal truth about oneself. **“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you**

not realize that Christ Jesus is in you — unless, of course, you fail the test?” (2 Corinthians 13:5) The greatest challenge of self-examination is getting past our deceitful hearts. (Jeremiah 17:9) We cannot possibly examine ourselves and see our sin. We must ask the Holy Spirit to search us and reveal hidden sin and wicked attitudes, because we cannot examine ourselves: “[You] **Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. [You, Lord] See if there is any offensive way in me [Am I doing something that displeases you?], and lead me in the way everlasting.**” (Psalm 139:23,24, insertions mine)

Five essential elements to examine in our own lives:

1. Do I Have a Prayer Life? Eternal life is a relationship with Jesus Christ. It comes through prayer. We seek God’s face in prayer. Prayer is both talking *and* listening. God does not look for elaborate prayers. He listens to the cry of our hearts and prepares us to hear from Him. We pray so that He can lay His agenda over our hearts. Jesus arose early in the morning to commune with His Father. (Mark 1:35; Luke 4:42) He needed to hear from His Father before He began to engage with the world. **“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.”** (Romans 12:2) A strong connection to God’s throne of grace helps us discern right from wrong and keeps us from conforming to the world. Prayer is how we receive wisdom and discernment to test and approve what is God’s will. Without prayer, we will be like the foolish virgins: not enough oil and found lacking.
2. Am I Reading God’s Word Daily? **“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”** (James 1:22) God reveals Himself and His ways through His Word. There is no substitute for it. It brings conviction to our lives. **“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”** (Hebrews 4:12) Without God’s Word, we [the inner court] are lost. God speaks to us through the Bible. We must rely on it and apply it personally.
3. Am I Obeying God? God has given us a tremendous gift in the power of choice. Like Cain and Abel, God will test our love and loyalty through our obedience to Him. For example, we may know that stealing is wrong. We would never rob a bank. However, if the Spirit reveals that I am stealing from my employer by surfing the internet while on the clock, I must make a choice to be obedient. The story of Zacchaeus demonstrates an important point. He was a crooked tax collector. Yet, when Jesus confronted Zacchaeus, he said he would repay four times the amount he had stolen. Jesus said that salvation had come to his house that day. Zacchaeus’ heart immediately submitted to God’s will and he chose to do what was right. Those who live by faith live a life of obedience. They demonstrate their love and faith in God through obedience. They are willing to do what is right. (James 4:17) **“If you love Me, keep My commandments.”** (John 14:15, NKJV) In fact, **“This is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome.”** (1 John 5:3)
4. Is God Correcting Me? Living under God’s authority as one of His children means He will discipline me. **“The Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”** (Hebrews 12:6; See also Proverbs 3:12.) He may use circumstances, people, His Word, or all three to get our attention. Our attitudes

need constant adjusting to remove the bitterness of offense, unforgiveness, disappointments, and irritations. Otherwise, harboring these attitudes creates pride and arrogance. **“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”** (James 4:6)

5. Am I Willing to Repent? Repentance is the ultimate demonstration of humility. Humility is the foundation for righteousness. It is acknowledging the sin God reveals and turning from it. (Matthew 3:8) **“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”** (2 Corinthians 7:10) When Nathan came to King David and said, **“You are the man!”** (2 Samuel 12:7), David immediately acknowledged the truth about himself and repented with no excuses or justification. The root of David’s pride was plucked out. David responded with Godly sorrow and made a way for the Spirit’s cleansing work of repentance. However, even with repentance, sin has consequences.

The honest-in-heart who are in the inner court today are allowing the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit into their lives. They are allowing God to prepare them today for what is coming tomorrow. They understand their accountability to God. Like Abel, they are willing to do what God requires because they love Him. Nothing will keep them from being connected and responsive to the Spirit. Their prayer life is a priority. They do not fit God into their schedules; they fit their schedules around God. They are willing to sacrifice whatever He requires to be in constant union with Him. The Holy Spirit fills their lamps daily. Their lives shine brightly wherever they go. They testify of God’s goodness and power in their lives.

“Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth — to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.’ ”

(Revelation 14:6,7) Soon, the entire world will hear a call to worship. A test is coming to separate the sheep from the goats. The inner court must be sanctified and holy according to God’s standards.

“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and will heal their land [the soil of our hearts].” (2 Chronicles 7:14)

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