

Does God Demand Worship?

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God Rejects Cain's Offering (Worship)

A few days ago, the subject of worship came up in a conversation. The discussion became lively when I objected to the idea that man is free to worship God according to the dictates of his conscience. I made the comment, "*The Bible does not support the idea that we can determine how and when to worship God. On the contrary, God tells us how and when to worship Him and willful deviation from God's demand is rebellion*".

To illustrate my point, I referred to Genesis 4. God rejected Cain's offering because Cain rejected God's demand God *demand*ed that a lamb be sacrificed, but Cain presented fruit.

The word *demand*ed upset my friends. They thought it would be better to say that God *required* Cain to bring a lamb. I asked "OK then, what is the essential difference between demanding and requiring in Genesis 4?" One person responded, "Maybe the word *required* is not as abrasive and confrontational as the word *demand*ed." "All right," I conceded, "It is true that God is tactful and considerate of man. He does not often thrust Himself into our affairs highlighting His demands.

But when God gets no respect, He will rise to the occasion and clearly state His demands." For evidence, I offered this text: ". . . **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 14:7)

Almighty God has the authority and right to *demand* anything He wants, and further, who can stop Him? (Isaiah 43:13) God does grant freedom of choice. We have the choice to submit to His authority or refuse His demands. Before sin occurred on Earth, God's laws (demands) were not in opposition to the way Adam and Eve lived, because their sinless hearts were in complete harmony with His demands.

However, after sin occurred, God's demands became hard to accept. His laws are not only contrary to the way the world's inhabitants live, but are also contrary to our rebellious nature. (Romans 8:7)

As the discussion progressed, it became apparent that my friends were confusing the topic of religious freedom with the topic of worship. Needless to say, my contribution to the discussion brought some controversy.

After the smoke began to clear, we began to differentiate between religious freedom and the worship of God. Several interesting issues surfaced. We came to agree that "religious liberty" (not worship) is defined as the privilege to worshiping God according to the dictates of our conscience.

In fact, religious liberty is the highest form of freedom *a nation* can offer and how wonderful and precious is this freedom! However, religious freedom should not be confused with the idea that we can worship God according to the dictates of our imagination.

God not only demands worship, but He has also given instructions about worship! (Exodus 20:3-11; 2 Kings 17:15; Psalm 47:2; Malachi 1:14; Luke 4:8) God considers willful deviation from His instructions as rebellion. Notice, I said "*willful*." Cain *willfully* rebelled against God's demand to sacrifice a lamb. Abel, on the other hand, submitted to God's demands and God approved of his offering.

Limited Knowledge

Our knowledge about God is very limited. He is infinite and He made us finite. My knowledge about God and His will for my life has developed over my lifetime, but everything I know about God is less than a speck of sand in the Pacific Ocean. Nevertheless, submission to God's will is usually a simple matter of "one thing at a time."

Regardless of social or financial consequences, if a person submits to the demands of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, that person is living in submission to the will of God, even though that person's knowledge of God's will is far from complete! For example, Daniel's three friends, Shadrack, Meshach and Abednego, knew nothing about the Mark of the Beast, but they did know that God *demand*ed no one should bow down to an image, including Nebuchadnezzar's golden idol. (Daniel 3; Exodus 20:5)

Since the laws of God encompass every aspect of life, and since our knowledge of God's laws is limited, it is true that all of us do things that are contrary to the will of God. Sometimes we do these things out of ignorance (Leviticus 4:13-21; 1 John 5:16) or sometimes out of willful rebellion (Matthew 12:31,32; Hebrews 10:26).

Paul wrote, "**For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**" (Romans 3:23) God knows our hearts and He also knows what is going on inside our heads, but to Him what counts most is our actions. (1 Samuel 16:7; Proverbs 15:3) God sees the "inner man" and everything we do. God also knows if we truly love Him with all our heart, mind and soul. If we could see ourselves as God sees us, none of us could endure the horrible sight.

Humans are full of deceit, selfishness and rebellion. (Jeremiah 13:23; Matthew 7:11; 15:19,20) This may sound strange, but each person has three sides. There is the person you think you are, there is the person you want others to think you are, and then there is the person you really are.

God is not fooled. He knows the person we really are even though we may not! (Matthew 26:34) Human beings are scheming, deviant, and self-centered. He knows the *only way* we can change is by forcing us to see our own imperfections reflected in the way we respond to His lawful demands. (James 1:22-26)

This is why God demands (through His laws) things of us, this is the purpose of His truth. God constantly tests our love through conflict. His demands are in direct opposition to the demands of this world. As a result, His tests reveal whether our love for Him is pure or contaminated with selfishness.

We mature spiritually as we learn from these tests of faith. (Exodus 16:4; Ephesians 4:13; Judges 2:22; James 1:1-12)

Rich, Righteous and Rebellious

Remember the rich young ruler story? (Matthew 19) The young man could not see any flaw within himself. (This is the guy he thought he was.) He thought he loved God and had kept all the commandments since childhood. (This is the guy everyone knew.) He was also rich.

The Jews considered riches to be tangible proof of God's approval and the young ruler concluded that he must be close to God. He was content with his position in life and the material wealth he possessed. But, God's view of the young man was very different from what he saw in himself.

The young man publicly asked Jesus what he lacked in order to be saved. He expected that Jesus would praise him before those present for being "such a fine and honorable person." Instead, Jesus placed a simple test before him. The rich young ruler "balked and walked."

His love for God was contaminated by his love for money he loved wealth more than he loved God. He could not meet the demand of the first commandment, "**Thou shalt have no other Gods before me.**" In our materialistic society, are we surprised by his failure or do we make excuses for it?

A Key Point

Even though Jesus knows our innermost thoughts, He does not judge us on the basis of this knowledge. He judges us on the basis of our actions because our actions reflect our choices and our decisions!

This is a key point: God does not judge us on the basis of what we believe, but instead judges us on the basis of what we do about our belief. (2 Corinthians 5:10; Ecclesiastes 12:14) Notice the words of Jesus: "**Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.**" (Revelation 22:12)

Our actions will be rewarded. A tree is known by its fruit. Our response to God's demands reveals either our submission to God or our rebellion against Him. Jesus made a strange statement when He said, "**You are my friends if you do what I command.**" (John 15:14)

To be friends with Jesus, we must submit to His authority. God is not our equal. Obedience is the fruit of love. Jesus said, "**If you love me, you will obey what I command.**" (John 14:15)

When we love God, His commands are not a burden. What is more annoying than having to do something you hate to do? Cain, for example, did not love God supremely and *willfully* refused to obey the Lord. He did not bring a lamb for a sacrifice because his heart was rebellious. (1 John 3:12)

Cain *professed* to worship God, but God was not impressed. God rejected Cain's offering on the basis that Cain violated His demand. God is fair, not arbitrary or temperamental. God would have accepted Cain's offering if Cain's heart and actions had been appropriate.

Cain's story, as well as other evidence in Scripture, teaches us that God does not allow anyone to dictate how He is to be worshiped! (Genesis 4:5; John 4:24; Luke 4:8; Mark 7:7,8)

The Coming Antichrist

The worship of God is a legal matter it is required by edict. (Exodus 20:3-11) Further, God made the seventh day of the week holy at the time of Creation and imposed the perpetual observance of His Sabbath by putting His demand within the Ten Commandments.

The fourth commandment (the observance of the seventh day Sabbath) is as important to God as the first commandment which demands that we have no other gods before Him! The Ten Commandments are actually ten "demand-ments." Yes, the world may treat them as "ten options," but this was never God's intent. (Jeremiah 25:4-7; Ezekiel 20:21)

The Bible predicts that the devil (the Antichrist) is going to appear on Earth during the Great Tribulation masquerading as God. (2 Thessalonians 2; Revelation 13:11-18) The Bible says the devil will exalt himself as God and to prove his assumed divinity, he will call fire down out of Heaven in full view of men! (Revelation 13:13)

The devil will *demand* and ultimately force everyone on Earth to worship according to *his* laws. (Revelation 13:16) Notice I said *demand*. Look at this verse: "**He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed.**" (Revelation 13:15)

Worship will become a matter of life or death during the Great Tribulation. On the basis of this and other texts, the Bible suggests the devil will establish a day for worship that will NOT align with Friday, Sabbath or Sunday.

2 Thessalonians 2:4 says, "**He [the devil] will oppose [all religions] and will exalt himself over everything that is called [the law of] God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple [wherever God is worshiped], proclaiming himself to be [Almighty] God.**" (Insertions mine) In other words, when the devil appears on Earth and exercises the omnipotent prerogatives of God (such as calling fire down out of Heaven), he will not favor the established religions of the world.

Rather, he will force everyone to abandon their former religious systems and participate in his

"new" one-world religion. God has ordained that every religion will be dissolved! God gives Lucifer the power to setup a one-world religion. (Revelation 13:14,15)

A "new day of worship" will force the issue of worship to a level playing field for everyone living on Earth. By mandating "a new day" for worship, a billion Moslems who worship on Friday cannot complain that "God" is favoring a billion Catholics who worship on Sunday, and a billion Hindus who have no particular day for worship cannot complain that "God" is favoring a billion Christians who do.

A Tough Question

When the devil *demand*s worship on his chosen day (and he promises death for anyone that refuses), most Christians will not be able to find a reason to object. This will be the case because most Christians believe that the Ten Commandments were abolished at the cross. So, when worship is required on the devil's holy day, most Christians will have no lawful reason to object because they believe there is no command (or demand) in the Bible indicating *when* to worship God.

So, the circle of this prophetic picture has been completed. From the beginning, God has demanded worship. He has specified how and when He is to be worshiped. Of course, we can refuse to obey God, but we cannot escape the consequences.

At an appointed time, the devil will be granted total authority to rule over the world. Masquerading as God, the devil will demand worship from everyone. Consequently, a great test of faith is coming. The living will have to make some tough choices and God will judge the living by their actions.

This scenario is a parallel to the story of the three Hebrews standing before the golden image and the fiery furnace. Will we submit to the laws of the devil-king or will we submit to the laws of the King of kings? When worship is reduced to the demands of law, where will we stand? The Bible says *everyone* will be forced into obedience or forced into rebellion. (Revelation 13:8)

How and when is God to be worshiped? His instructions are found in the Ten commandments. The instructions are so simple that a child can understand them read it for yourself! God is going to test the faith of all humankind to see who loves Him.

This coming test will center on worship and it will separate brothers, just like it separated Cain and Abel in the beginning. The coming test will challenge the faith of every person. In both cases, there will be death: If a person worships the devil and receives his mark, Jesus will kill him or her at the Second Coming. (Daniel 2:44; Revelation 19:19-21) If a person worships Jesus and refuses the mark of the beast, he or she will become a target for destruction. (Revelation 13:15)

Wow! The world is destined for a great controversy over the issue of worship and few have any idea that it is coming. Even worse, many Christians think they are going to view the Great

Tribulation from a safe perch in Heaven.

For additional reading on this subject, review chapter 5 in my book, "*Warning, Revelation is about to be fulfilled.*"