

A COMMON MISTAKE

“When you offer blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice lame or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?” says the Lord Almighty.” (Mal. 1:8)

These Hebrews made a common mistake. They treated the governor, better than they treated God. They feared the governor more than they feared God. How utterly foolish! Unfortunately, “many” make the same mistake. Jesus said: **“Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’” (Matt, 7:22, 23).** We cannot treat God as second in importance and still be saved.

Yes! God does love the world (Jn 3:16). Yes! God is patient with us, not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). But no! This does not mean that we can treat God as second best or dictate the terms of our own salvation.

Remember! God is a Jealous God (Ex. 20:5). He forbade the Hebrews to build an altar of dressed stones or to use any tool on the altar (Ex. 20:25). When we come to worship God nothing is to detract us from making Him the central focus of our worship. You cannot fool God. Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). God knows what we are thinking when we “worship”. For example, God saw the Hebrews sacrificing a bull like they were killing a man or offering a lamb like they were breaking a dog’s neck (Is. 66:3).

Similarly, when anyone came to Jesus He could look into their heart and know what they were thinking (Jn. 2:25). Remember! The way a man thinks is the way he is (Prov. 23:7). A man once came to Jesus vowing to follow Him wherever He went. Jesus knew better! The foxes had holes and the birds had nests, but Jesus didn’t have a place to lay His head (Lk. 9:57, 58). At the same time Jesus rejected two others that on the surface seemed dedicated to God. The first was rejected because he put his father first, and the second because he put his family first (Lk. 9:59 – 62). Yes! We are commanded to honor our fathers and mothers (Eph. 6:2), and yes, those who do not provide for their families are worse than unbelievers (1 Tim. 5:8). The point is that we are to love God first and then care for our families, not the other way around. God will not take second place even to our parents and family members. The most important commandment in the Bible is to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mk. 12:30). Loving anyone or anything more than God is a form of idolatry.

Remember! Christianity is like a marriage (Eph. 5:22 – 33). Marriage requires that we leave out fathers and mothers and cleave to one another in the marriage union (Gen. 2:24). Imagine, if you can, a bride standing at the wedding altar and telling her fiance that she actually loves someone else more than she loves him. That’s not a marriage! Yet this is precisely the way many treat God.

Not everyone who says “Lord, Lord” will enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 7:21) What we “do” is more important than what we “say”. When wicked King Belshazzar disrespected God a sleeveless land wrote his doom in unforgettable letters on the wall. Daniel reminded him of his folly: **“You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways.” (Dan. 5:23).** Do you see it? It is the same problem that raises it’s ugly head in every generation. Jesus said: **“I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.” (Lk. 12:4, 5).**

Solomon said: **“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7).** Conversely, Paul said that if he were trying to please men he wouldn’t be a servant of Christ (Gal. 1:10). Against all human wisdom those who put God first experience abundant life (Jn. 10:10). God opens the windows of heaven for us and pours out a blessing so great that we will not have room to receive it (Mal. 3:10). Please do not make the mistake of honoring the governor more than God!