

“Worship the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness”

Psalm 96:7-9: (Part I)

All people have an appreciation for things that are beautiful. Few people cannot look and the works of God in the creation without experiencing a sense of awe. Every culture places value on the physical appearance of beautiful women and handsome men. It is the beauty of a thing that often causes people to be attracted to it, whether it is a landscape, art, or the appearance of a person. In this lesson we are going to consider something that is more beautiful than the outward adornment of a woman and more glorious than the most colorful sunset. We are going to consider the *beauty of holiness*. In Psalm 96:9 the psalmist speaks of God’s people as worshipping Him “*in the beauty of holiness*” because it is in holy conduct that true beauty is manifest.

True Beauty

While the majority of the world places great emphasis on physical appearances, God teaches us that true beauty goes much deeper than the skin. When God sent Samuel to appoint a king to replace Saul, Samuel beheld the oldest son of Jesse and thought, “*Surely the Lord’s anointed is before Him!*” But the Lord spoke to Samuel saying, “*Do not look at his appearance or his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as a man sees, for a man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart*” (1 Sam. 16:5-7). Indeed, the Lord did not choose any of Jesse’s older sons. Instead, He chose the youngest of them all, whose appearance was described as, “*ruddy, bright eyes, and good looking*” (1 Sam. 16:12). This ruddy young lad would later be known as King David. God honored David and made him king, not because he was handsome, but because David’s heart was set upon the Lord, because he put all his faith in the Lord, and because he was holy in his conduct. There were several instances in David’s life where his conduct was less than holy, but he is still referred to as “*a man after God’s own heart*” (Acts 13:22), because, whatever his faults, he was willing to repent and turn back to God (Ps. 51).

In the New Testament God instructs us concerning the source of true beauty in 1 Pet. 3:3, “*Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of the Lord.*” This passage refers to women, but the principle behind it is universal. The Lord’s standard of beauty is not clothing styles, makeup or physical appearances, but the condition of the heart and the manner of one’s life.

The beauty of holiness is what God’s people must seek, because it is the kind of beauty with which God Himself is adorned. “*And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us*” (Ps. 90:17). Therefore we are commanded in 1 Pet. 1:15, 16, “*but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’*”

Though it is good to be respectable in our outward appearance, God’s people must learn to seek the beauty of holy living above all. For how we adorn ourselves outwardly ought to reflect the kind of person that we are inwardly (1 Tim. 2:9-10).

Holiness in Worship

In spite of these timeless principles, it is evident that the same influence which seeks to glorify and exalt outward appearances in the world is having an effect in the church as well. How so? In our society it is not uncommon for Christians to make a distinction between their duty to God on Sunday and their duty to God during the other six days of the week. A man may appear to be respectable and honorable when in the presence of his brethren during the assembly, but when he is at home or out in the world he is a completely different person. It is in addressing this very issue that we get to the heart of what it means to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

Holiness is not something to strive for one day out of the week. It is not something that we should seek only when we come together on Sunday. Rather, worship that is offered in holiness is offered by those who strive to live holy lives every day of the week. Worship that is offered in truth (John 4:24) is offered according to God's specific commands. But the holiness which makes our worship pleasing to God is the result of living holy lives outside of our worship. That is why Paul teaches us in Rom. 12:1, saying, "*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.*" As Christians, seeing that Jesus gave His life for us, we must in turn offer our lives to God as living sacrifices.

In the Old Testament the priests would offer animal sacrifices on the altar every day. But today, because of Christ, animal sacrifices are no longer necessary. Rather, Jesus gave Himself for our sins once for all so that we might be made acceptable to God. And because of Jesus' sacrifice, we are the priests and what we offer every day is not the lives of animals, but our own lives, which we give to the service of God. Thus, the Hebrew writer exhorts us in Heb. 13:15-16, saying, "*Therefore by Him (Christ) let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*" Again, Peter writes in 1 Pet. 2:5, "*you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*" It is because of this truth that Peter goes on to say in 1 Pet. 2:11-12, "*Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles...*"

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There are many other things that we can discuss to help us learn the meaning of this phrase. Some of those things we will discuss in part II of this lesson. But, in this final section, let us consider how our daily conduct affects our worship to God, and most importantly how we can worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

We must understand that if we live in rebellion, willingly continuing in sin, then whatever worship we offer to God is not beautiful in His sight, but is displeasing to Him. In 1 Pet. 3:7 we learn that if a man does not dwell with his wife in a godly manner that his prayers are hindered. When the Bible speaks of "sinners" it is not referring to people who have sinned, for "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" Rather, this word refers to those who choose to continue living in sin, who ignore the commands of God, and who do not strive to live holy lives. Concerning such people it is written in John 9:31, "*Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him.*" In the Old Testament there are many examples where people would worship God, but their worship would be in vain because they were busy serving other gods.

Let us understand, therefore, that our worship must be more than motions or works that we do once a week. Rather, the worship that we offer, whether at home or in fellowship with the rest of God's people, ought to be the result of much forethought and preparation according to which we devote our entire lives to doing God's will. Where we honor God with our lips, let us also seek to honor Him with our hearts and with our deeds (Col. 3:16). When we give, let it be the result of purposeful contemplation (2 Cor. 9:7). When we take the communion of the Lord's body and blood, let us do so having examined our own hearts beforehand (1 Cor. 11:28). As we prepare to learn and study God's word, let us do so having prepared our hearts to apply the things that we learn and to do them throughout the rest of our days (James 1:22).

If we apply our lives to the service of God in holy conduct, then when we offer up our worship it will indeed be in the beauty of holiness. The Psalmist describes that worship in Ps. 96:7-9, "*Give to the LORD, O families of the peoples, give to the LORD glory and strength. Give to the LORD the glory due His name; bring an offering, and come into His courts. Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth.*"

When we give glory to the Lord in our worship, let us also glorify Him with our lives (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Let our worship be in the beauty of holy conduct, such as reflects the nature of God. Let us remove all hypocrisy and evil thoughts from our hearts. Let us incline our hearts to God to walk in His ways. In so doing, our lives will be beautiful in the sight of God.

Conclusion

As we consider the wonder of these things, some may be concerned that their sins may be hindering their worship. Having this concern many try to hide from God by not worshipping Him at all or by forsaking the assembly of His people. Let us understand that God is the One who makes us worthy. Thus we must never think that it is by our own works that we deserve to worship Him. However, if we do have sin in our lives, we are commanded to repent and turn our hearts back to God. This is something that every Christian must do so that when we offer up our worship our hearts truly belong to God.

If we have sinned, let us repent, confessing our sins to God, and ask Him for forgiveness. Therefore, John writes in 1 John 1:9-10, "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.*" Do you worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness? Do not let your worship be jaded by sin. Do not offer worship that is halfhearted. Rather, devote yourself fully to God so when to give Him glory and honor you do so with your whole Heart. He is Lord; He is worthy!

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