Lent 5 Worship and the deceiver part 2

Over Lent we have been looking at the hard topic of worship, one we seldom take time to examine. We have looked already at what it is, our heart attitude to worship, getting our hearts right with God and the need to pray worship 24/7.

Last week we identified that the source of our distractions from worshipping God with all our hearts and souls and minds, of deception and desires, lies and half truths

And we looked at one of the ways in which we are tempted is taking our eyes off true and that was that he counterfeits the truth about God. He lies and tells half-truths.

Today I want to continue to uncover his strategies which distract us from true worship.

The Shorter Westminster Catechism of 1646 is a series of questions and answers for people coming to faith. The first one is this:

Q. 1. What is the chief end of humanity? (In other words, what is our purpose)

A. Humanity’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.

Our worship goal is about fostering a deeper relationship with God. It’s about experiencing His presence in every part of our lives and allowing His love and grace to transform us. As we fix our gaze on Jesus (Hebrews 12:1-3), we gain clarity, purpose, and a renewed sense of devotion, enabling us to live out our faith with conviction and joy.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Hebrews 12 *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.*

Let us be aware of these things that keep our eyes off Jesus in order that we are wise to the devil’s plans and can counteract them.

Our nature and the bright shiny things – the bling - of the world around us take our eyes off God.

I want to highlight 3 attitudes today that get in the way of wholeheartedly worshipping God fully 24/7 in spirit and truth.

And I deliberately use the word “Attitudes” because attitudes come from our heart/our inner core and that determines our thoughts and our behaviours.

1. The first is the assertion of self.

Our claims of self-actualisation, self-importance, self-serving, it’s all about me and what I want. distract us from worshipping.

Authors Kinnaman and Lyons document that 84 percent of Americans believe that “enjoying yourself is the highest goal of life.” Further, 86 percent believe that to enjoy yourself you must “pursue the things you desire most.” And 91 percent affirm this statement: “To find yourself, look within yourself.”

They comment that in our day, the Westminster Catechism answer has been inverted: “the chief end of humanity is to glorify and enjoy themselves forever.” They suggest that we could even make a case that self-worship is the world’s fastest-growing religion.[[2]](#footnote-2)

We are not talking about an appropriate sense of self-worth and appropriate self-esteem found through relationship with God, we are talking about an inflated sense of self-importance and the need to have that validated.

Samuel Chadwick reminds us that Satan's way to thrones and dominion is by the assertion of self for self-realisation[[3]](#footnote-3)

In the Gospel of John, Jesus clearly warns against the pursuit of self-glorification. He states:

*Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory, but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him.* (John 7:18 NIV)

Paul in Romans 12:3 *For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.*

The idea that self is paramount takes God off the throne and replaces him with us on that seat.

Assertion of self is not what true worshipping is all about.

That was the reason Satan was kicked out of heaven. He was a created being who aspired to be more important than everyone including God.

In this pursuit of self, Paul gives Timothy some timely advice concerning thee attitudes in these latter days, in 2 Timothy 3:1-5 *But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. 2 People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, 4 treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power.*

This is the problem with this cult of self-worship—besides the obvious problem of being a rebellion against God: When we try to be our own sources of truth, we slowly drive ourselves crazy. When we try to be our own sources of satisfaction, we become miserable wrecks. When we become our own standard of goodness and justice, we become obnoxiously self-righteous. When we seek self-glorification, we become more inglorious.[[4]](#footnote-4)

We end up worshipping ourselves and that is not right, healthy or appropriate and is totally unfulfilling in the long run.

Scripture makes it clear that self-glorification, pride, and comparisons (us to others) are detrimental. Instead, we are called to seek God's glory, recognize our own weaknesses, esteem others higher than ourselves, and practice humility.

In a world where self-importance is often glorified and our rights are considered paramount, these biblical principles provide a countercultural perspective that promotes humility, self-awareness, and genuine righteousness. By adhering to these teachings, we can cultivate a character that aligns with the values of the Kingdom of God.

Our true worship of God needs less of our belief in our self-importance and more of placing God as the sole object of our adoration.

Do not settle for putting anything above God or in the place of God even if it is you, even if worldly wisdom suggests doing so. Pull down that idol and replace it with God, back in his rightful place.

Recognise your rightful place in the order of things and do not listen to the enemy who says that you are the highest object of be all and end all worship.

1. The second distraction is our pursuit of happiness and ease.

By that I mean our claimed rights to be happy, our claimed right to live a life of ease, “after all haven’t we earned it?”

This attitude distracts us from placing God as the author, sustainer, and finisher of our lives, and removes the awe that we should feel for God.

2 Timothy 4:3 *For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,*

The United States of America puts happiness right at the top in their Declaration of Independence: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

The world says be happy. If you are not happy, then change your job, change your partner, change your church, change whatever affects your assessment of your fulfilment.

We are told that happiness is a feeling, or that happiness is a result of wealth or health, or that it can be attained by having the right product for the right moment or by perfecting one’s circumstances or fitness or beauty so we can build a buffer against bad things happening to us.

When these things become an idol, we are being deceived.

Contrast this with the Christian vision of happiness which is of a life nourished by the love and goodness of God that contributes to the flourishing of creation. Happiness that comes from worshipping our creator. Knowing that there is forgiveness of sins, that we are never alone, that God knows our needs, that we have a saviour who restores our relationship with God, that we have a God who is good.

So, when are we often vulnerable to this deception? It is when our guard down, when we feel safe, when we are content, when we think we are happy. We forget to worship God and settle into thinking all is fine.

Daniel 8:25 *he will destroy many while they are at ease. He will even oppose the Prince of Princes.*

So, we need to alert to the subtle attraction of ungodly practises that take us away from worshipping God and him alone.

1 Peter 5:8 *Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*

Happiness was never meant to be found in things. Ultimately the call of happiness is a call to the deep joy in life that is found when one discovers one's place, purpose, and identity in a relationship with God[[5]](#footnote-5)

There is an easily remembered saying that says love people and used things, not love things and use people.

Seek God about everything and focus our worship on him.

Our culture has taught us the dangerous notion of entitlement. We think we deserve to be healthy and wealthy, to live without struggle and to be continually happy[[6]](#footnote-6)

And as a result, we become slaves to that by which we wish to find happiness.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

1. The third one I want to focus on today is our busyness that keeps us from worshipping.

Samuel Chadwick again: The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.

In today’s culture, busyness has become a badge of honour.

Being busy and being important often seem to mean the same thing.[[8]](#footnote-8)

There is a saying about the tyranny of the urgent, about when the urgent gets in the way of the important.

We need to prioritise what is important for us and put in place practices that make it so. Our culture and its half truths get in the way of worship

When we say to ourselves, I am too busy now to put God first, the devil wins. Because we will never find the time to get back to God.

When we forego worshipping corporately on a Sunday morning, he wins because one Sunday morning turns into a habit of months, and the support we get by meeting corporately to support one another is not there.

When we forget God throughout the week and fail to worship him every day, he wins.

And even when we beat ourselves up for not doing those things, and we say it is too hard, and we stop, he wins because he is not called the accuser of the brethren for nothing.

So far we have looked at 4 strategies which hinder our likelihood of worshipping God. There are others but I think we get the idea with these 4.

In all of this, we are reminded that our battles and struggles with life and particularly worship are with the devil as in Ephesians 6:12 For *our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

When we realise that we are opposing the prince of the air who has been plaguing God’s people since the beginning of our existence, we should have eyes to see his wiles and turn back to God with a contrite and humble heart, with a perseverance to overcome the enemy.

Romans 8: 31 *If God is for us, who can be against us? .34Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? …37 In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

We are in a war, make no mistake about that – a war for the possession of our hearts, thoughts, actions and attitudes.

Let us examine our response to the worldly charms and distractions and press on through the one who deserves our worship.

Place God in his rightful place in our lives.

Next week I want to base our topic of worship on Psalm 51:16-17

*For You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; You take no pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.*

And I wonder if anyone would like to share a testimony on how their worship attitude has changed over this series.

1. https://www.patheos.com/blogs/jacksonwu/2024/09/17/worship-through-attention-guarding-against-idolatry/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/self-worship-booms/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Samuel Chadwick *The Way To Pentecost* 62 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/self-worship-booms/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. David Benner *Care of Souls* 116 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Marva Dawn *Joy in Divine Wisdom: practices of discernment from other cultures and Christian traditions* 97 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Henry Chadwick *Augustine* 55 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Henri Nouwen *Making All things new and other classics* 10 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)