

Psalm 115 • You Are What You Worship

Introduction

It is perplexing as to why there are so many speakers, books, seminars, and web sites devoted to what a church should do when it comes together, when all of the answers are so plainly provided within Scripture itself. Much of their appeal is in proportion to embracing the false belief that we're "modern" or "different" from our biblical ancestors. Once we get past that denial, we find that not only has man's nature remained the same to this day, but so too the remedies.

¹Not to us, O LORD, not to us,
But to Your name give glory
Because of Your lovingkindness, because
of Your truth.

²Why should the nations say,
"Where, now, is their God?"

³But our God is in the heavens;
He does whatever He pleases.

⁴Their idols are silver and gold,
The work of man's hands.

⁵They have mouths, but they cannot
speak;

They have eyes, but they cannot see;

⁶They have ears, but they cannot hear;
They have noses, but they cannot smell;

⁷They have hands, but they cannot feel;

They have feet, but they cannot walk;
They cannot make a sound with their
throat.

⁸Those who make them will become like
them,

Everyone who trusts in them.

[Read v.1-8]

Q: What is significant with how this Psalm begins? How does it contrast or simulate our own spiritual attitude?

A: It begins with a denial of self, a proclamation of seeking God's glory rather than one's own. It's either a contrast to those who claim to be in Christ yet continue to elevate their own name and person first, or parallels the life completely surrendered which no longer elevates itself above Him.

Application: How do you honestly suppose that others who have come to know you in the course of life at home, church, work, or in the community would rate you on a scale from "self" on one extreme to "a reflection of Christ" on the other?

Q: What are the two characteristics of God's glory which the Psalmist highlights?

A: "... Your lovingkindness... Your truth." (v.1)

Q: Why does the Old Testament so often mention "lovingkindness" instead of "grace"? Are they one and the same?

A: The Hebrew word "hesed", most often translated as "lovingkindness" is the expression of God's determination to keep His promises to His chosen people in spite of their sin and rebellion. Obviously it involves some aspects of God's grace, but it is **NOT** an apathetic response to sin, but a deliberate act to bring the sinner back to God. It's God's divine mercy and forgiveness towards sinners when repayment of sins through the sacrificial system were no longer effective because of spiritual unfaithfulness breaking the covenant relationship. "Lovingkindness" is most often associated with "covenant" and "faithfulness".

Q: So why are these particular characteristics highlighted? How do they relate to rendering glory to His name instead of our own?

A: They embody the correct, essential starting point from which spiritual faithfulness results: restoration from sin to instead live a changed life according to His Word. Without them, the results are always a life separated and in constant error.

Application: How might this relate to our need to constantly address every issue of sin? How is this complimented by seeking to measure every personal behavior according to the truth of His Word? How is biblical love impossible without this starting point?

Q: How is v.2 revealing a contrast between those who have embraced God's lovingkindness and truth and those rejecting them?

A: Those rejecting God's lovingkindness (the opportunity to be reconciled from sin) and His truth (His Word) are setting their own terms as to how God must reveal Himself in their statement, "Where, now, is their God?" Those who have applied His truth and lovingkindness to their life are

comfortable with His sovereignty and that He is in control regardless of how circumstances appear on earth as revealed by the response, “He does whatever He pleases”.

Point: *It’s not an issue of knowledge, but the object of one’s faith.*

Q: What is the physical contrast of the God of His people and the gods of those rejecting Him?

A: Whereas the One True God “is in the heavens”, the gods of such men are “the work of man’s hands”.

Point: *Interesting that even though a person admits the unspeakable breadth of creation and powers unknown behind it, they will at the same time embrace a substitute which is obviously the result of something indisputably man-made and local, whether a physical idol or some kind of philosophical replacement.*

Q: What do all the features have in common which are listed as being installed on man’s substitute gods?

A: They’re all physical attributes of man himself; “mouths”, “eyes”, ears”, “noses”, “hands”, “feet”. They try to imitate the Creator who created man with such things, but their efforts never succeed in breathing life into their weak imitations as God breathed into the original.

Point: *It’s quite poetic that the One True God is capable of doing everything which their substitutes cannot: “speak”, “see”, “hear”, “smell”, “feel”, and “walk”.*

Q: What is the irony of this effort? How does it compare to that of the faithful follower of Christ?

A: You become what you worship. Seeking substitutes results in losing the senses of sight, hearing, speech, etc. when it comes to the spiritual, whereas embracing His lovingkindness and truth develops and heightens those same senses.

Application: *How does this apply to those in the church who have become desensitized and worldly versus those who experience an ever deeper commitment to God’s Word and ways? How might this apply to those areas of your life with which you still struggle?*

[Read v.9-15]

⁹O Israel, trust in the LORD;

He is their help and their shield.

¹⁰O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD;

He is their help and their shield.

¹¹You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD;

He is their help and their shield.

¹²The LORD has been mindful of us; He will bless us;

He will bless the house of Israel;

He will bless the house of Aaron.

¹³He will bless those who fear the LORD,

The small together with the great.

¹⁴May the LORD give you increase,

You and your children.

¹⁵May you be blessed of the LORD,

Maker of heaven and earth.

Q: What are the 3 groups who are exhorted to “trust in the LORD”?

A: “Israel”, “house of Aaron”, and “you who fear the LORD”.

- “Israel” are those who have a covenant relationship with God.
- The “house of Aaron” are those born into the tribe of Levi who are called to minister on behalf of God’s covenant people.
- “You who fear the LORD” refer to all those outside the formal covenant relationship who don’t simply acknowledge God, but worship Him. Think of Job, Melchizedek, Jonah sent to Nineveh, or any other example of those found outside Israel proper to be in a right relationship with God.

Q: So what is the message being conveyed that God will bless all of these groups?

A: Whoever is responsive to God’s lovingkindness and truth will experience God’s blessings.

Point: *Greater than happening to be born into Israel, or even born into the priesthood for special service, is the even greater qualification of “those who fear*

the LORD". It's about being responsible to personally apply that for which God has made you aware.

Q: What specific forms are identified which attest to whether or not we actually have the kind of biblical trust being extolled here?

A: "He is their help and their shield". It's trust that He is greater than the circumstances and, regardless of how they might presently appear, will "help" or address them on our behalf, and trust in His protection as a shield against the attacks of the enemy regardless of their longevity or intensity.

Point: Note that this mirrors the armor of God in Ephesians 6 in that it's all about remaining in a defensive position, withstanding the attack while awaiting God to deliver in His own way and time.

Q: How are v.14-15 a kind of rebuttal to the attributes of false gods listed in the previous section of verses?

A: Whereas manmade idols are incapable of any response or action, and they are a dead-end of man's own creation, the One True God is not only capable of rendering blessings, but allowing His creation to themselves create something real through children.

Application: How does biblical "trust" relate to patience, endurance, and faith? How are "blessings" actually the result of trust? How might this speak concerning areas with which we struggle both spiritually and in life?

[Read v.16-18]

Q: What is the greater thought being expressed in v.18 than just the fact that God is "up there" and we're "down here"?

A: God has not made us responsible for knowing and understanding everything, especially the incomprehensible goings on in the heavens of which we're not physically a part, but has limited our responsibility to what has been revealed here on earth below.

Q: What is the greater thought being expressed in v.17 when it comes to the true nature of death from an earthly perspective for Believers?

A: In reality there is no death for Believers. What has begun on earth is merely continued in a different form upon death. Our attitude of praise begun in this life is continued into the next, whereas those who have become like their idols which "cannot make a sound with their throat" (v.7) are mute from God's point of view both in this life and the next.

Q: So who exactly is "us" as being asserted in v.18?

A: We who have become like what we worship, the Living God. Whereas worshipping false gods renders one dead and therefore mute, worshipers of the One True God become like Him in being made alive, active, and able to speak, hear, and so on. We are able to praise and bless, whereas they are not, both in this life and the one to come.

Overall Application

There are quite a variety of devices and methods employed by individuals, churches, and even entire spiritual movements in their pursuit of worship. Using what has been discussed, how would you compare yours as either accomplishing or failing to achieve the goals of true worship? If you judge them to fall short, why is it essential to change them before you become like them?

¹⁶The heavens are the heavens of the LORD,
But the earth He has given to the sons of men.
¹⁷The dead do not praise the LORD,
Nor do any who go down into silence;
¹⁸But as for us, we will bless the LORD
From this time forth and forever.
Praise the LORD!