

WARNING ABOUT “WILDGRAPE” WORSHIPPERS

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The word “worship” comes from an old English word which means to show honor and worth. In the Bible, there are a number of words that are translated worship. In Hebrew, it means “to bow down, to do homage”. In Greek, it contains the idea of “showing reverence to God” and “to serve, or to minister”. Worship then involves both attitude and action. When we worship God, we recognize His worth, rejoice in it, and act upon it to give Him honor and glory. That is the essence of worship! However, sometimes we forget what worship really means, and just refer to it as our “service” or “ministry” to the Lord. And that incomplete idea of worship is a serious problem which can destroy our inner being.

In one of my quiet times, the Lord reminded me through the book of Isaiah, that a “service only” kind of worship is unacceptable to Him. Let me share some of my insights.

Isaiah 5:1-7 contains a parable about the vineyard of the Lord. In this parable, the vineyard refers to the house of Israel, and the plants refer to the men of Judah (v.7). In the beginning of the passage, we can see the Lord’s faithfulness to His vineyard from the preparation until the

production stage (vv.1-2). He made sure that the location, foundation, and selection of grapes are good. He even built a watchtower for protection and prepared a wine vat for production. However, despite everything the Lord did to His vineyard, it still yielded wild grapes (vv.3-4). And since these wild grapes are unacceptable, the Lord set it out for destruction (vv.5-6). The question is, “How did the well-prepared and selected plants turn out to be wild grapes?”. To answer that, we must first ask, “What does this vineyard (Israel) look like?”. And to understand the state of Israel during Isaiah’s time, let us take a look at these passages:

“Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged.” (Isa. 1:4)

“What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.” (Isa. 1:11)

The first passage describes Israel as a corrupt and sinful nation who had forsaken and despised

the Lord. The second one gives us an idea that Israel was still practicing sacrificial offerings. This gives us a picture that the Israelites were sinning against the Lord and serving Him at the same time! They were active worshippers, but God called them wild grapes!

We must realize that the sacrificial system introduced in Exodus during Moses’ time is for the Israelites to be ritually cleansed. However, it seems that during Isaiah’s time, people forgot or ignored the significance of sacrificing to the Lord. Their service to the Lord became a meaningless discipline. I believe that is the reason why God’s chosen people turned out to be wild grapes. They worshipped wholeheartedly at first, made it a habit, ignored its significance in the long run, then it led them to become corrupt and sinful worshippers.

May this reminder serve as a warning for us not to become wild grape worshippers who serve God and sin against Him at the same time. Let us remember that worship includes the attitude of reverence and adoration, as well as the action of service and obedience - to a Holy God! ✱