

Lesson 2

Worship and the Exodus: Understanding Who God Is

The monotheism of Islam's god (Allah) is a great improvement over the polytheism of the heathen. But despite the fact that Moslems acknowledge Christ to be a prophet like Abraham, Moses, and Mohammed, they reject the message of the cross. In so doing they reject the righteousness of God and His *agape* as the Saviour of the world.

A right "understanding [of] who God is" involves worshiping Him as the God of *agape* (1 John 4:8). This undeniable character of God is revealed in Moses' worship experiences in the book of Exodus.

Walking through the desert and seeing a burning bush that was not being consumed was a phenomenon worthy of Moses' attention. It was Christ "the *Angel of the LORD* [who] appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush (Ex. 3:2; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 23). God told Moses to put off his shoes for this was "holy ground" (Ex. 3:5).

Christ in His humanity was represented to Moses by the unconsumed burning bush. At Moses' commissioning for the leadership of Israel he was assured of the fellowship of Christ. Moses worshiped and served God with a right understanding of the humanity of Christ who was "tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

Commenting on Exodus 3:5, Ellen G. White makes the following classic statement: "The *humanity of the Son of God is everything to us*. It is the golden chain that binds our souls to Christ, and through Christ to God. ... Christ was a real man" (*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 244).

To Mary the angel spoke these words at Jesus' birth--"that *holy thing*" (Luke 1:35). Christ took our mortal, self-centered, sinful nature to His holiness and condemned it in the flesh right up to the final "one just [righteous] act" of the cross (Rom. 8:3; 5:19, NEB). In all of human history there has only been One righteous person, and that is Christ.

Christ's holiness was tested and tempted by the fires of persecution, but was not consumed. "The burning bush in which was the Lord's presence did not consume away. ... The furnace fire of *temptation* may burn, persecution and trial may come, but only the dross will be consumed" (*Ye Shall Receive Power*, p. 131).

The Ten Commandments are a revelation of the perfect model to "understand who God is." Many look upon them as do's and don'ts; that if you obey them you'll be saved, and if

you can't, you'll be lost. They perceive the law as a heavy burden, ten precepts carved in cold stone, heavy prohibitions that crush out all the joy of life. The Ten Commandments seem like roadblocks in the highway of happiness.

These people are overlooking three major facts: (1) no person ever has or ever will be able to keep one letter of the law of God--even through their best efforts; (2) the preamble to the Ten Commandments declares us to be already delivered from sin (the land of Egypt) and addictions (the house of bondage); and (3) the preamble is God's continuing act of deliverance from the servitude to sin. "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Ex. 20:2).

We are born naturally self-centered thanks to the first Adam. But the Father has placed the entire race in Christ (for safekeeping) from "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). "In Him" we have all died and been resurrected. We are delivered from the land of Egypt (slavery to sin). "The faith of Jesus" has been given to everyone and if unhindered, makes them to be doers of the law of God.

The preamble reminds us that we have been delivered from Egypt (sin) for the purpose of worshiping the true God of love. The preamble is the good news of God's New Covenant promise that transforms the Ten Commandments into ten great promises. God will never allow sin to bind us again.

Here is a simple example using the eighth commandment: "You shall not steal." Without the preamble, this "shall not" leaves you as the one to keep yourself from stealing. However, with the preamble God initiates the saving, "I have brought you out of bondage and will keep you from stealing. It is My promise to you!"

The good news of the 1888 message is that when we understand and believe the inspired preamble to the Ten Commandments, when we appreciate what the Son of God has done for us, all this modern idolatry loses its charm. It's not the gold, silver, or wooden crosses in churches that captivate our souls; it's the understanding of the love of Christ that is revealed at His cross.

After God's providential leading and deliverance of ancient Israel from Egyptian slavery, how could they worship the golden calf? It seems incomprehensible that they should be so stupid.

"The fall, it has been rightly said, was the transferring of man's worship from God to self. ... The gospel [which is the law in Christ] turns men's worship back again from self to God. It shows men that self is nothing, and God is everything." [1]

This was the reason for their calf worship. They invented their old covenant promise to God. "All that the Lord hath spoken *we* will do" (Ex. 19:8). *We* will do everything just right, Lord. Their confidence in themselves to do righteously was the basis of their old covenant ("feeling that they were able to establish their own righteousness," *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 372). This was the worship of self.

The result was "they broke their covenant with God" by worshiping the gold calf (Ibid.). It meant they were turning their backs on God's plan of salvation and were deliberately going back into the sex orgies "worship" that was ruining the pagan world--self-worship.

The little book *Steps to Christ* tells why: "You desire to give yourself to the Lord, but you are weak in moral power, in slavery to doubt, and controlled by the habits of your life of sin. Your promises and resolutions are like ropes of sand. You cannot control your thoughts, your impulses, your affections. The knowledge of your broken promises and forfeited pledges weakens your confidence in your own sincerity, and causes you to feel that God cannot accept you" (p. 47).

Here's the problem! The memory of your frequent failures to keep your promises makes you feel that you are no good and "that God cannot accept you" or respect you. And that is horrible slavery.

A far better way is under the "New Covenant." It was God's New Covenant promise that was a personal deliverance from a life of drug addiction. There is nothing sinners bring to help God in saving us. Personal promises are of no avail.

Promising God that you will do better is the same as promising Him you will continue to ignore His words and promises while "trying" to replace them with your ineffectual efforts in an attempt to please Him. There couldn't be a better definition of Baal (self) worship. Instead of promising God that you will do better, worship by thanking Him that He has promised to save you, that Christ has already given Himself for you and bought you with His blood, and that you are precious in His sight.

God only has good news for us. The new covenant opens before us new vistas of "understanding who God is" so that our worship may be in harmony with His character.

--Daniel H. Peters