

Title: **GODLINESS OR JUST A FORM OF GODLINESS?**  
 Text: Zechariah 7:1-14  
 Subject: *Worship*  
 Date: Sunday Morning — April 30, 2006  
 Tape # Zechariah #32  
 Reading: *Isaiah 58:1-14*

1. Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.
2. Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God.
3. Wherefore have we fasted, *say they*, and thou seest not? *wherefore* have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours.
4. Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye *do this* day, to make your voice to be heard on high.
5. Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? *is it* to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes *under him*? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?
6. *Is not* this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?
7. *Is it* not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?
8. Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward.
9. Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I *am*. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity;
10. And *if* thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness *be* as the noonday:
11. And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.
12. And *they that shall be* of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.
13. If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, *from* doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking *thine own* words:
14. Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*.

## INTRODUCTION

That which the Word of God calls “*godliness*” is the worship of God. — “*Godliness with contentment is great gain*” (1 Tim. 6:6). Blessed are they who, being born of God, worship God in Spirit and in truth! Blessed is that person who, trusting Christ as his Savior and Lord, worships God, ever coming to God by Christ Jesus!

But, when the Bible speaks of “*a form of godliness*” (2 Tim. 3:5) the reference is to the mere practice of religion. “*A form of godliness*” is going to church. “*A form of godliness*” is engaging in religious activity. “*A form of godliness*” is “saying your prayers.” How few there are who have the blessed great gain and sweet contentment of godliness! What multitudes there are who have a form of godliness!

## A QUESTION

That is exactly what we find in Zechariah 7. Two years after the foundation of the temple had been laid in Jerusalem (Hag. 2:10, 18), and about two years before it was finished, the Jews recently returned from Babylon were sent a delegation to the house of God to worship and to inquire of the priests and the prophets Malachi, Haggai and Zechariah about the worship of God (vv. 1-3). They had a question about worship, a question about their religious practices.

(Zechariah 7:1-3) “And it came to pass in the fourth year of king Darius, *that* the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah in the fourth *day* of the ninth month, *even* in Chisleu; (2) When they had sent unto the house of God Sherezer and Regemmelech, and their men, to pray before the LORD, (3) *And* to speak unto the priests which *were* in the house of the LORD of hosts, and to the prophets, saying, Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years?”

These people had been in Babylon for 70 years. During those long years of captivity, though they had no temple and were not able to maintain the ordinances of divine worship God had established in the law, they devised forms of worship for themselves. The walls of the temple were now about half finished, and it seemed likely that it would be completed. So this delegation came to God’s priests and his prophets, seeking the counsel of the Lord about how they should worship him. — That is commendable! If we would worship God, we must learn from God himself how to do so! We are not left in the dark about this (John 4:23-24; Phil. 3:3).

(John 4:23-24) “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. (24) God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth.”

(Philippians 3:3) “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

God must be worshipped in the spirit; and he must be worshipped truth, according to revealed truth.

## RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

But, while the Jews were in Babylon, they had established and had regularly observed some religious traditions, ceremonies God never commanded, and called the observance of their traditions the worship of God. They had practiced their religious customs for 70 years. Now they asked God’s priests and his prophets, “Should we maintain our form of godliness?” — “*Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years?*” (v. 3) — They had established solemn fasts, commemorating the things they had witnessed and experienced.

- On the 17<sup>th</sup> day of the 5<sup>th</sup> month they kept a day of fasting and humiliation in remembrance of the day the Chaldeans had destroyed the temple (v. 3).

- On the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the 4<sup>th</sup> month they kept another annual fast, weeping and mourning, separating themselves from food and drink, in remembrance of the destruction of Jerusalem.
- Every 7<sup>th</sup> month they held another fast in remembrance of the murder of Gedaliah and the captivity of the Jewish remnant in more remote parts of Israel 9 (v. 5).
- And on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> month they kept a fast commemorating Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem.

All these solemn fasts involved considerable sacrifice and effort. At first glance, we might think that they were good things. While they were in Babylon the Jews wanted to remember the things they had witnessed and experienced. They wanted their children to remember. How could they better secure that end than by establishing religious traditions and ceremonies? So they observed these four solemn fasts every year for 70 years.

### HORRIBLY EVIL

But their religious traditions were horribly evil. **The Lord God had ordained only one fast, a fast to be kept by the children of Israel once each year in connection with the day of atonement** (Lev. 16:29-34). But the Jews could not keep the day of atonement and the fast God required in Babylon. So they invented four fasts that they could keep, and gratified themselves with those fasts. In all four of those fasts, they gloried in that which was their shame for 70 years!

Those traditions and customs established and observed in Babylon were the beginning of Phariseeism. They paid great attention to formalities and external worship. They invented and maintained a form of godliness; but the power of godliness was unknown. They strictly tithed the mint, the anise, the cummin of religion, but knew nothing of mercy, compassion and justice. They multiplied ceremonies to themselves, ceremonies without any warrant whatever in God's Word. They observed fasts and holy days Moses never commanded, and religious feasts for their own pleasure, calling them acts of divine worship (vv. 4-6).

(Zechariah 7:4-6) "Then came the word of the LORD of hosts unto me, saying, (5) Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh *month*, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, *even to me?* (6) And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat *for yourselves*, and drink *for yourselves?*"

Paul's admonition to us in 1 Corinthians 10:31 specifically refers to this passage.

(1 Corinthians 10:31) "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

The Lord God almighty calls all the religious activities invented by men sin, sin to be exposed and condemned by his faithful servants. He declares that all such religious practices, though solemnly performed in his name, are but an outward show in the flesh, acts of will-worship, and nothing but deeds of sensual gratification and pleasure (Isa. 29:13; 58:1-5; Jer. 2:5; Matt. 15:8; Luke 16:15).

(Isaiah 29:13) "Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near *me* with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men."

(Isaiah 58:1-5) "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. (2) Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God. (3) Wherefore have we fasted, *say they*, and thou seest not? *wherefore* have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours. (4)

Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do *this* day, to make your voice to be heard on high. (5) Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? *is it* to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes *under him*? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?"

The fast he chose and ordained (Lev. 16:29-34) was a ceremonial picture of repentance and faith in Christ, a fast connected with the sin-atonement sacrifice of the Son of God.

(Jeremiah 2:5) "Thus saith the LORD, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?"

(Matthew 15:8) "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me."

(Luke 16:15) "And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God."

Learn this, with regard to all religious ceremonies. — Whatever they are, no matter how old they are, no matter how universal they are, no matter how delightful they are to men, if they be not expressly commanded of God in his Word, they are an abomination to him, and should be to us. They are nothing but rubbish. The sooner they are hauled to the garbage dump and burned the better (Neh. 4:10).

(Nehemiah 4:10) "And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and *there* is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall."

There is so much rubbish and garbage in the church today that a foundation cannot be laid until the garbage is recognized and carted off to the garbage dump, where it belongs! We cannot build a wall of hope on religious rubbish. We cannot erect a wall of security on a pile of garbage. If we would worship and serve our God, we must clear his house of all the rubbish men bring into it by their vain philosophies, religious traditions, and foolish sentiments.

## HEAR THE WORD

Our only authority for faith and practice, our only standard is and must be the Word of God (v. 7).

(Zechariah 7:7) "*Should ye not hear* the words which the LORD hath cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and the cities thereof round about her, when *men* inhabited the south and the plain?"

**The churches of our day are what they are and do what they do because they wilfully choose to ignore the Word of God and choose to supplant the worship of God with their own, sensual pleasures.**

- Instead of Gospel preaching, we have plays!
- Instead of prayer meetings, we have business meetings!
- Instead of praise, we have programs!
- Instead of believer's baptism, we baby sprinkling!
- Instead of the Lord's Supper, we have vespers!
- Instead of God the Holy Spirit, we have committees and by-laws!
- Instead of worship, we have ways and means!

- Instead of bowing in the presence of Christ, we bow before crucifixes, crosses, pictures of Jesus, and the images of angels!

The Lord God required Israel to keep one, just one solemn fast throughout their generations. It was the same solemn fast that he requires us to keep by faith. The Lord God required in his law that the children of Israel keep a fast on the day of atonement (Lev. 16:29-30). As you know, the day of atonement was a picture of our redemption by Christ. **The fast that God required the Jews to keep on that day was a fast portraying and typifying faith in Christ our Passover who was sacrificed for us** (1 Cor. 5:7; Isa. 58:6-7).

(Isaiah 58:6-7) *“Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? (7) Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?”*

**These two verses vividly portray the conversion of a sinner by almighty grace, by the regenerating, convicting, faith giving work of God the Holy Spirit** (John 16:8-11).

(John 16:8-11) *“And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: (9) Of sin, because they believe not on me; (10) Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; (11) Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.”*

**When Christ is revealed in you and God grants you life and faith in him...**

- The **bands of wickedness** that hold you in bondage and captivity under the sentence of death shall be loosed from you.
- The heavy **burden of guilt and sin** that oppresses you and makes you mourn shall be taken away.
- **Your oppressed soul** shall go free.
- Your **hungry soul** shall be filled with bread, even the Bread of Life!
- Your **poor soul** shall be made rich with the riches of God’s boundless grace in Christ!
- **Your nakedness** shall be covered, and you will cease to hide yourself from yourself and from God.

(Isaiah 58:8) *“Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward.”*

(Isaiah 58:11) *“And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.”*

- Then, you will **call Christ, your Sabbath a delight**, finding rest for your soul in him (Isa. 58:13).

(Isaiah 58:14) *“Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*.”*

When those Jews added their traditions to the Word of God, when they invented other fasts in Babylon, they were adding their own devices to Christ’s finished work; and God refused to accept them. That is how serious this matter is. We must worship God after the due order, or we cannot worship him. If we dare put our hands to God’s Ark, as Uzza did, God will kill us just like he did Uzza! If we dare attempt to

mix the sensual pleasure of our own works to the blood and righteousness of Christ, we will perish forever under the wrath of God!

## GOD'S DEMAND

Those men refused to hear God's prophet of old, but the Lord graciously spoke to them again by Zechariah. He told Zechariah to declare his demands to them (vv. 8-10).

(Zechariah 7:8-10) "And the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah, saying, (9) Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and show mercy and compassions every man to his brother: (10) And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart."

Men prefer fasting to faith and a sad countenance to a saving Christ. Men prefer the sackcloth of religious rituals to the robe of Christ's perfect righteousness. Why? Because we all like to build shrines and memorials to ourselves! Faith in Christ is such a self-emptying, self-loathing thing, that none but those taught of God and born of the Spirit can rejoice in it.

- By faith in Christ, our crucified Substitute, we **execute true justice**, taking sides with God against ourselves (Ps. 51:4) and offering that by which alone justice can be satisfied — The Lamb of God!
- Preaching the gospel of Christ, proclaiming to needy souls the Lamb of God, we **show mercy and compassion**, the mercy and compassion of God in Christ!
- Looking upon one another in Christ, we **cease to imagine evil against our brethren** in our hearts, each esteeming his brother better than himself.

## THE CAUSE OF WRATH

Read the last verses of this chapter, and you will see that the cause of God's wrath upon Israel and the cause of God's wrath and judgment today is the obstinate rebellion of God-hating unbelief. People go to hell because they love pleasure, the pleasure of self-righteous, works religion, and despise the free grace of God in Christ. By their religion they make void the Word of God. By their pretended worship, and fasting, and piety they harden their hearts in rebellion to God. (vv. 11-14).

(Zechariah 7:11-14) "But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. (12) Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts. (13) Therefore it is come to pass, *that* as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the LORD of hosts: (14) But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them, that no man passed through nor returned: for they laid the pleasant land desolate."

What can be more deluding and damning than the delusion of a form of godliness that denies the gospel of Christ, which is the power of godliness?

## TAKE OUT THE GARBAGE

(Nehemiah 4:10) "And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and *there is* much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall."

Will you hear the word which the Lord has declared by the former prophets? In the time that remains, let me take out the garbage, and build the walls of Zion.

I say to you as Peter said to those who stood before him on the Day of Pentecost, "*Save yourselves from this untoward* (warped, winding, crooked, and perverse) *generation*" (Acts 2:40).

There is so much rubbish in the churches of this day that a true gospel message cannot be preached in most places of worship, without utter warfare breaking out among those who profess to be worshipping God and serving him. Everybody has “*a form of godliness*” (religion) to which they tenaciously adhere, all the while denying the power of true godliness (the gospel of the grace of God). The religious generation in which we find ourselves today was well described by the apostle Paul as a people, “*ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (2 Tim. 3:7).

There is so much rubbish in religion that the first thing a preacher has to do is get a big shovel and dump truck, clear out the rubbish and haul it to the garbage dump. Until that is done, nothing else can be done. As I said a few minutes ago, — We cannot build the walls of Zion upon a pile of garbage. We cannot build a wall of hope and security on religious rubbish. The foundation cannot be laid until the rubbish is recognized, dealt with, and hauled away. Cleaning up a pile of garbage is never easy or pleasant. But it must be done. Faithful men in every generation have found the work both necessary and costly.

- Moses — Korah and His Crowd
- Elijah — Ahab and Jezebel
- Hezekiah — The Brazen Serpent
- Paul — Judaizers
- Luther — Indulgences
- Calvin — Romanism
- Whitefield — The Church of England
- Edwards — A Regenerate Membership
- Spurgeon — The Downgrade Controversy

I have preached in a good many churches in the last 38 years; and I think I know where the problem is. I think I know what the rubbish is. Let me point out three things that must be dealt with, if we are going to build a wall of hope and refuge for eternity bound sinners in our day.

## THE LAW OF GOD

In religious circles today, I am talking about churches of every brand, the holy, pure, immaculate, unchanging law of God has been whittled down to a set of rules for men to obey by mere outward religious exercise and outward conformity. — **Righteousness has been reduced to a work of man** (Matt. 23:25-27).

(Matthew 23:25-27) Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. (26) *Thou* blind Pharisee, cleanse first that *which is* within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. (27) Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead *men's* bones, and of all uncleanness.

**This was the condition Saul of Tarsus was in before God saved him.** He was a devoutly religious man. His religious zeal and devotion would put you and me to shame. But he didn't know God at all.

- He had gone to church all his life.
- He graduated from the Gamaliel School of Theology with honors. — Magna Cum Laude!
- He taught the Scriptures.
- He was a man of indisputable morality.
- This is how he describes himself (Phil. 3:5-6).

(Philippians 3:5-6) Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; (6) Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Here is a man who was deeply religious, who lived by the law, and boasted of his righteousness before the law. But he did not know God or his law. He was as lost as any sinner on the top side of God's earth. Then something happened. **God stepped in!** (Acts 9; Rom. 7:9)

(Romans 7:9) For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.

**God the Holy Spirit came to that lost religionist, revealed Christ in him, and in doing so revealed the true character of God's holy law to him.** When he saw Christ and was convinced by God the Holy Spirit that righteousness was accomplished and brought in by Christ (John 16:8-11), for the first time in his life, he was made to see that God requires truth in the inward parts and he had nothing in him but deceit. For the first time in his life, he saw that there was no comeliness in him, but only sin. God stripped him buck naked and brought him to shame.

(Romans 7:9-11) For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. (10) And the commandment, which *was ordained* to life, I found *to be* unto death. (11) For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew *me*.

The law he once boasted of keeping now made him tremble, for it exposed his sin.

If you should ask the average person, in the pew or in the pulpit, to tell you why he hopes to go to heaven when he dies, he would say something about God, and grace, and Christ, and atonement. Then, he would tell you the real basis of his hope. — "I..."

**Has the Lord Jesus Christ ever come to you by the saving operations of his Spirit and revealed his holy law to you?**

(Matthew 5:20) For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

- That righteousness that God requires, you cannot perform.
- It is a righteousness performed for us by Christ and given to us by grace.
- And godliness, true godliness, is not outward, but inward. — "*The Lord looketh on the heart.*"
- Christianity is not a creed, but a Person. It is not outward, but inward. — "*Christ in you, the hope of glory!*"

That's the first piece of garbage that must be hauled away, if we are going to worship God. We must be made to see that no man can, by anything he does or experiences, make himself righteous before God. The bondwoman and her son (works religion and all who promote it) must be cast out!

## **DEGENERATE WORSHIP**

The *second* problem is this. **Worship, or what people call worship, has degenerated into nothing but religious entertainment and ceremony performed under the disguise of worship.** Most churches are nothing but religious social clubs, with rules, regulations, and ceremonies, and a good place for businessmen to network. If God the Holy Spirit did not exist, it would not change a thing in most churches. Their program would move along without a glitch.

- You don't need the Spirit of God to make a decision for Jesus. But you must have him to be born again.
- You don't need God the Holy Spirit to reform your life. But you must have him to be regenerated.
- You don't need the Holy Spirit to make a profession of faith. But you must have him to get faith.
- You don't need the Holy Spirit to learn a creed and learn to fight for it. But you must have him to learn the gospel.
- You don't need the Spirit to stand up and testify. But you must have him to bow down and worship!



- You don't need the Spirit of God to be devoted to religious activity and service. But you must have him to sit at the Master's feet and hear his word!
- You don't need the Spirit of God to be immersed in water. But you must have him to be baptized into Christ.
- You don't need the Holy Spirit to observe the Lord's Supper. But you must have him to communion with Christ and remember him.
- You don't need God the Holy Spirit to recite a prayer. But you must have him to pray.
- You don't need the Spirit to give out a lesson. But you must have him to preach a message.
- You don't need the Holy Spirit to give a tithe. But you must have him to offer two mites in the name of the Lord.
- You don't need God the Holy Spirit to love religion. But you must have him to love one another.
- You don't need the Spirit of God to meet together. But you must have him to be "*the temple of the living God!*"

If God the Holy Spirit did not exist, if there were no God, no Christ, no salvation, no eternal life, with most religious people, nothing would change. In most churches, nothing would change.

- You don't need God to have a business meeting. But you must have him to have a prayer (worship) meeting.
- You don't need God to be in the church. But you must have him to be in Christ.
- You don't need God to have a church house. But you must have him to be a "*habitation of God through the Spirit.*"

Every time I read about our Savior driving the money-changers and sacrifice peddlers out of the temple, I cannot help thinking to myself, how furious he must be with men's intrusions into his house today. **There is no place in the house of God, the house of prayer, except that which involves the worship of God.**

- Gospel Preaching
- Gospel Ordinances
- Prayer
- Praise

(1 Corinthians 10:31) "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

That's the second problem. The churches of our day have said good-bye to God. And worship has degenerated into nothing but man-centered religious activity. I say to the preachers, pastors, religious leaders, and churches of this dark day — Cast out your programs and ceremonies, or you will never worship God!

## A CORRUPT MESSAGE

Here's the *third* problem in churches around the world today. — **The church of this perverse age has substituted the message of the gospel, the message of God's free and sovereign grace in Christ, for a corrupt and perverse message of works.** Everywhere today people are told to stand up and be counted. The gospel of God demands that you bow down and worship. There's a difference! The message of substitution, the message of our Lord's blessed obedience and sin-atonement sacrifice, and salvation by him, in him, from him, and for him, has been replaced with...

- "Will you let God save you?"
- "Won't you give your heart to Jesus?"
- "The decision is yours."
- "You must do your part."
- "What's your decision?"
- "The Lord wants to save you."
- "You need to start serving the Lord."

- “Open your heart to the Lord, and he will come in.”
- Decisional Regeneration
- The Sinner’s Prayer

(Galatians 1:6-9) I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: (7) Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. (8) But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. (9) As we said before, so say I now again, If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

When we have cleared away the rubbish, the Foundation can be laid and the walls of Zion can be built. The Foundation is Jesus Christ crucified. In his day, the only place where John the Baptist could preach the gospel was in the wilderness. There he lifted up his solitary voice in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, crying out to eternity-bound sinners, “*Behold, the Lamb of God!*” Let us, like John the Baptist, cry out to immortal souls in this wilderness, “*Behold, the Lamb of God!*”

- Jesus Christ is not just a good example after whom you must pattern your life. He is “*THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS!*”
- He was not a religious reformer. He was and is God our Savior!
- He did not die as a martyr in a noble cause. He died as the Lamb of God, a blood sacrifice for sin.
- He is not God who wants to save. He is able to save to the uttermost all who come to God by him.
- T.U.L.I.P.

Most people love the garbage and seek to destroy the temple. But, if the Lord God will give us grace today to clean out the rubbish, if he will again drive the merchandisers and their merchandise out of his house, and make his house a house of prayer for needy sinners, maybe, just maybe, we will see the same thing happen that happened when he did it long ago (Matt. 21:14). We might just see sinners healed by his almighty grace.

(Matthew 21:14) And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them.

Amen.