

PSALM 50

AGAINST HYPOCRITICAL WORSHIP

This Psalm teaches us – in the teeth of all hypocrites, and all their false devotion – what true worship really is. It shows us the nature of sacrifices which are acceptable in the sight of Jehovah. Hypocrites consider their works, merits, and sacrifices to be of such high value that they think God Himself ought to acknowledge the benefit of their services. They flatter themselves with the imagination that He somehow is indebted to them and *needs* their offerings and their worship. But on the contrary, the Holy Spirit – by His inspired Psalmist – declares with a loud voice what the true worship of the Lord is: namely, that which the First Commandment says to do. And that is to worship God and adore Him, to confess that we receive all things from His hand, and to acknowledge that all glory is due to Him alone! Here we are briefly told that the true way to God is to call upon Him in the day of trouble, and to give thanks to Him for the infinite benefits which we receive from Him; for this is truly to “pay our vows unto God, and to offer unto him thanksgiving” (as verse 14 says). These vows are the highest of all vows, wherein we have committed ourselves to love and serve the Lord alone, and to worship Him – and none other – as our God. Of these matters, foolish hypocrites and self-imagined saints know nothing whatsoever.

This is a Psalm of instruction. It prophetically speaks of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and the Day of Judgment, in which God will call people to account (verses 1-6). All men ought to be concerned to know the right way of worshiping the Lord in spirit and in truth. On that great Day, our God shall come; and then He shall make those persons hear His judgment who refused to listen to His law. But O how happy are those who come into the covenant of grace, by faith in the Redeemer’s atoning sacrifice, and who show the sincerity of their love by fruits of righteousness. God rejects the services of those who rest in mere external performances, but He will graciously accept those who seek

Overview of the Psalm, adapted from Charles Spurgeon:

This is the first composition that bears the title, “A Psalm of Asaph”; but whether it was the production of that eminent musician’s pen, or merely dedicated to him, we cannot tell. Twelve Psalms bear his name in their titles; but it cannot be meant to ascribe their authorship to him in all of them, for several of them are of too late a date to have been composed by the same writer as the others. However, it matters little to us whether he wrote these sacred songs or merely sang them, for poet and musician are closely related; and if one person composes words and another sets them to music, they rejoice together before the Lord!

The Lord is here represented as summoning the whole earth to hear His declaration (verses 1-6). He then declares the nature of the worship which He accepts (verses 7-15), He accuses the ungodly of breaches of the precepts of the second table of the law (verses 16-21), and He closes the court with a word of threatening (verse 22) and a direction of grace (verse 23).

Him aright. It is only by sacrifice – particularly, by Christ’s one and only perfect Sacrifice – that we can be accepted by the Lord. True and righteous are His judgments; for even sinners’ own consciences will be forced, on the Day of Judgment, to acknowledge the righteousness of God!

In verses 7-15, we are reminded that to obey is better than sacrifice. To love God and our neighbor is better than all burnt offerings that we could ever offer. Here we are warned to not rest in outward performances of any kind. God demands worship from the heart, and how can human inventions please Him when repentance, faith, and holiness are neglected? In the day of distress (verse 15), we must call out to the Lord in fervent prayer. Our troubles come from God’s hand; and they are intended to drive us to Him, and not away from Him. We must acknowledge Him in all our ways. We must depend upon His wisdom, power, and goodness; and we ought to commit ourselves entirely into His keeping, and thereby give Him glory. In this manner, we must keep up communion with God – meeting Him with prayers when we find ourselves under trials, and then not forgetting to render Him praise when we have received His gracious deliverances.

Hypocrisy is wickedness, which God will surely judge (verses 16-23). And alas! It is only too common – as we see in verses 16 and 17 – for persons to declare the Lord’s statutes to others, and yet live in disobedience to them themselves. This delusion arises from the abuse of the Lord’s longsuffering patience, and a willful ignorance of His character and His Gospel-message. How dreadful it will be for such persons on that day when God will set their sins before their face (verse 21), to their everlasting shame and terror! O that they would consider their urgent danger! O that they would cease forgetting their God, giving themselves up to wickedness, and neglecting the salvation that is so freely offered to them! The patience of the Lord is very great, even though obstinate sinners make such ill use of it; but if they do not turn from their iniquities and turn to Him, they shall be made to see their error when it is too late. Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever; therefore, let us pray for grace to learn how to offer the spiritual sacrifice of praise to His holy name. We must offer Him our praises, and put them into the hands of our Great High Priest – namely, our Lord Jesus, Who is also the Altar! Let us thankfully accept God’s mercy, and endeavor to glorify Him in word and deed.

Lord, we confess that we have often rendered our worship to You as a matter of mere external ritualism, instead of giving You the love and service of our heart. Help us to not fall into the error of resting in spiritual shadows, while we overlook the real substance. Thank You for bringing us into the covenant of grace, by faith in our Redeemer’s atoning work of redemption! Amen.

