

# Rise Up And Build

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*"So They said, 'Let us rise up and build,' Then they set their hands to do this good work," Neh. 2:18*

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February 13, 2022

## Vain Worship (No. 1)

*"Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying These people draw near to me with their mouths, and honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And **in vain** they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:8,9),.*

In these versus Jesus was speaking to the Scribes and Pharisees who had questioned Him regarding His disciples because they were not observing certain "*traditions*" which originated with man as opposed to having been ordained by God. In His initial reply, Jesus went on the offensive and answered their questions with a question it being, "*Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your traditions*" (Matt. 15:3). He then referred directly to their practice of avoiding their God-given obligations to "*Honor*" their parents by simply saying, with regards to what should have been given to their parents, that "*It is a gift to God*" (Matt. 15:5). In essence, like so many today, they thought that they could absolve themselves of their parental responsibilities by merely making a contribution to a worthy cause.

Perhaps to their great surprise, the plain-spoken Jesus called them "*hypocrites!*" He then described the actions of some in Isaiah's day as being identical to their own actions in that they drew near to God with their mouth; they honored Him with their lips, but their heart was far from God. No wonder Jesus called them "*hypocrites,*" for that is exactly what they were. But the real shocker is in the fact that Jesus described their worship as being "*in vain.*"

"*Vain,*" as used in this verses, is translated from a Greek word which means "void of results." Worship, which utilizes the use of the lips, but does not involve the heart, and worship which includes "*teaching as doctrines the commandments of men,*" is described as "*vain,*" it is void of results; it is fruitless, it neither pleases God nor benefits the would-be worshipper.

In the Old Testament, which is “*written for our learning*” (Rom. 15:4), there are numerous examples of men whose worship was vain, or void of desired results. Cain worshipped God, when he brought “*an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord.*” However, inasmuch as he did not worship “*by faith*” as did his brother Abel (Heb. 11:4), the faith which is based upon the revelation of God (Rom. 10:17), then God “*did not respect Cain and his offering*” (Gen. 4:4,5). His worship was vain. According to Leviticus 10:1,2, Nadab and Abihu took censers, put fire and incense herein and “*offered profane before the Lord, and fire went from the Lord and devoured them*”. Because they obtained fire from the wrong source, God burned them up — even though they were attempting to worship God! They might have rationalized, saying, “fire is fire, what difference does it make where we get the fire?” But the fact is, it **did** make a difference; it displeased God; it rendered their worship vain, and it cost them their lives! According to I Samuel 13:9,10 King Saul offered a burnt offering to God, and he was severely reproved by Samuel because he acted without divine authority. It was intended as worship to God, but God was sorely displeased. Saul’s worship was vain, void of results; it was fruitless, and it displeased the very God to whom it was offered!

Please remember that when Jesus said “*in vain they worship Me,*” He was not making a quotation; rather He was drawing a conclusion, His Own conclusion based on His perception of the action undertaken. In other words, **Jesus** is the One Who described their worship as “*vain.*”

Yes, God, our Creator, the One in whom “*we live and move and have our being*” (Acts 17:29), is described in Revelation 4:11 as “*worthy to receive glory and honor and power.*” Jesus, according to Matthew 22:37,38, said “*the first and great commandment*” is to “*love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*” So it is evident that God is the Object of our greatest affections; He is worthy of our praise. In fact, Jesus, when tempted by Satan, said “*Away with you Satan! For it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve*” (Matthew 4:10). Of all the things we do, nothing is more important, nor more ennobling to man, than that of worshipping God. Nevertheless, notwithstanding these facts, “*worship*” which involves action, but which is not from the heart, and worship which is not according to the biblical pattern prescribed by God, is described as “*vain.*” It does not glory God, and it can even incur the **wrath** of God. Consider ye well!

### “Vain Worship” (No. 2)

No doubt, to their great surprise, Jesus described the worship of certain Scribes and Pharisees as “*vain*” (Matt. 15:9), a word meaning empty, fruitless or void of results. In view of the biblically stated importance of worship, as well as the ennobling effects of worship, many find it difficult to believe that Jesus could have ever used the word “*vain*” to describe worship. But no person ever demonstrated a greater appreciation for the proper worship of God, nor as much disdain for improper worship. It was Jesus Who made a “*whip of cords,*” and drove from the temple those who sought to make His “*Father’s house a house of merchandise*” (John 2:12-16). Their actions adversely affected the Scriptural worship of God, and Jesus went into action, even demonstrating His righteous indignation. It was Jesus Who criticized the worship of the Samaritans, and

told the Samaritan woman that “*the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeks such to worship Him*” (John 4:23). And, yes, as we have noted, it was Jesus Who said the worship of certain Scribes and Pharisees was “*vain.*” Hence, in view of the importance of this issue, we ask “What Constitutes Vain Worship?”

**1. Worship is “vain” if it is accompanied by “teaching as doctrines the commandments of men”** (Matthew 15:8,9). Those who exalt the commandment of men above the commandments of God are giving glory to men; they are not glorifying God! Viewed in this light, it is little wonder that Jesus described such worship as “*vain.*”

**2. Worship is “vain” if it is not accompanied by godly living!** It was God Who in Old Testament times, required the offering of animal sacrifices, the burning of incense, and the appropriate times for worship. However, regarding some who lived during the time of Isaiah, God said He hated their appointed feasts; He said their sacrifices were “*futile,*” and their “*incense is an abomination*” (Isa. 1:13-15). But prior verses in the same chapter reveal that these people were “*laden with iniquity,*” they were called “*a brood of evildoers,*” and they were further accused of having “*forsaken the Lord,*” and having “*provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel.*” Yes, they were Israelites, the people to whom the Law of Moses was given; they continued to offer sacrifices and observe the Sabbath, but they lived immoral and corrupt lives, so God regarded their worship as an “*abomination!*” Such hypocrisy is no less an “*abomination*” today!

**3. Worship is “vain” if the “heart” of the worshipper is “far from” God,** as Jesus said in Matt. 15:8,9. According to John 4:24, worship must be “*in spirit and in truth.*” To worship “*in spirit*” necessitates the proper action of the heart, the emotions, the mind, the will, and the intellect. To illustrate this point, we state that the singing of spiritual songs is a part of worship, but this also involves “*singing with grace in your heart to God*” (Col. 3:16. Partaking of the Lord’s Supper is an item of worship to be observed on the first day of the week (Acts 2:42; 20:7), but one who partakes in an unworthy manner, according to I Corinthians 11:29, “*eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.*”

**4. And worship is “vain” if it is not governed by “truth,”** for Jesus said “*God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth*” (John 4:24). Inasmuch as God’s “*word is truth*” (John 17:17), then worship which is “*in truth*” is worship which includes the scriptural items of worship, and which is void of any man-made alterations to the divine plan. Scriptural items of worship on the Lord’s day consist of five elements: (1) Preaching the apostles’ doctrine, or the word of God, Acts 2:42; 20:7, (2) Partaking of the Lord’s Supper, Acts 2:42; 20:7, (3) Prayer, I Corinthians 14:15; Acts 2:42, (4) Congregational singing of “*spiritual songs,*” Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16, and (5) contributing of one’s means in keeping with his prosperity, I Corinthians 16:1,2; 2 Cor. 9:6,7. In view of the principles already stated, as well as the command not to add to nor take from the word of God (Revelation 22:18,19), it should be evident that any human alteration of these items — such as praying to Mary instead of to God, or using mechanical instruments of music instead of simply acapella singing, etc — would result in a perversion of the divine plan, and therefore cause the worship to be “*in vain.*”

Let it be clearly understood — **God** is the proper Object of worship. He knows **how** He wants to be worshipped. In the Scriptures He has revealed the plan which constitutes acceptable worship, and we must not deviate therefrom, lest we become guilty of worshipping God “*in vain.*” —by Bobby Witherington

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**True:** “The man who has to eat his own words never asks for another serving.”

**Also True:** “The world crowns ‘success;’ God crowns faithfulness.”