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Worship Killers in Hearts

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Introduction.

1. How often do you fail to worship in the assembly?
2. When you fail to worship, how often is it your fault?
3. What is the most serious hindrance to your worship?
4. How do you try to combat that hindrance?

Exploring Worship Killers in Hearts.

Even if the hymn we are singing is everything it should be, it does not guarantee that we will worship. There are still a lot of things that can go wrong, and many of them go wrong in the heart. Problems as varied as inattentiveness and pride can have their source in the heart of a Christian. In this lesson, we're going to look at a number of the ways that heart trouble can kill worship.

Apathy-Based Failure. As humans, we are simultaneously blessed and cursed with the ability to get used to almost anything. This helps us endure times of prolonged hardship, but it also causes our joy in the good things of life to fade--even things as good as our salvation. Between human nature and the work of the devil, it is almost a guarantee that we will from time to time struggle with **APATHY**.

New Testament writers identify the problem in several different places. In Galatians 4:15, Paul asks the Galatians, "Where then is that sense of blessing you had?" Similarly, in Revelation 2:4, John rebukes the church at Ephesus for having left its first love. Both churches had lost touch with the gladness that comes with knowing Christ. Even though this failure was caused by false teachers in Galatia and prosperity in Ephesus, apathy was the result in both places.

Apathy can lead us to sin and even to falling away. When we consider one of the most dramatic sins in the Bible, the sin of David with Bathsheba, we often attribute David's fall to a number of different factors: pride, lust, and so forth. However, David himself implies that apathy was the root problem.

In Psalm 51, David's magnificently tormented plea for forgiveness, he doesn't pray for humility or for sexual continence. Instead, he cries out to the Lord, "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation!" Apathy had left a void in David's heart where his passion for God should have been. In that void, Satan was able to sow the seeds of sin.

Apathy causes us to sin in worship just as it causes us to sin elsewhere. One of the primary signs of apathy at work in our worship is **INATTENTIVENESS**. It's safe to say that all of us struggle at times with keeping our minds on track during worship. I've known eminent songleaders, hymnwriters, preachers, and elders who have told me that they fought that battle. Inattentiveness is a familiar foe to all of us.

Yet how many of us struggle with paying attention when we're doing something we truly love?

Why is it that I have a much easier time keeping my attention on a football game than on the worship of the Lord?

When it comes to your favorite activity, can you say that you're any better off than I am?

Closely related to the problem of inattentiveness is **JOYLESSNESS**. Philippians 4:4 instructs us to rejoice in the Lord always, and this should be especially evident in our worship. Sadly, the opposite is often true. I have worshipped with brethren who sounded like they were singing the dirge for their own funeral. Sometimes, the hymn selection is at fault here, but sometimes the problem lies in the hearts of the worshippers. Apathy has stolen our joy, and it becomes apparent in the way we sing.

SYMPTOMS OF APATHY:

- 1. Inattentiveness.**
- 2. Joylessness.**
- 3. Failure to apply the hymn.**

In a slightly different way, **FAILURE TO APPLY** the hymns we sing to our own lives is also a result of apathy. In this case, though, the apathy is directed more narrowly, toward the content of hymns specifically rather than toward God generally. This brand of apathy is connected to the common failure to recognize that hymns are teaching tools in the same way that sermons and Bible classes are teaching tools.

In the spiritual realm, the benefit we receive from an activity is often closely related to the attitude with which we approach it. The doubter who prays for wisdom will receive nothing (James 1:5-8). The fool despises wisdom and instruction (Proverbs 1:7) and so cannot be instructed (Proverbs 17:10). In the same way, if we come to a worship service expecting to learn nothing, nothing will be what we learn. Hymns can be a valuable source of instruction in our spiritual lives, but apathy can cause us to ignore them altogether.

Pride-Based Failure. The other root cause of heart failure in worship is **PRIDE**. It appears whenever we desire to exalt ourselves instead of God. As Psalm 131 makes clear, pride is not the sin of the secure. A man who is content within himself is both unconcerned about the opinions of others and willing to give glory to God. Only the weak and insecure need to grasp at every scrap of honor available by seeking praise from men and withholding praise from God.

Pride may manifest itself in worship through an undue **FOCUS ON SINGING**. This does NOT mean that all attention to the mechanics of singing is bad! Indeed, the revival of interest in singing that has swept the church in recent years has contributed greatly to our ease of worship. Nor does it mean that we shouldn't sing to our brethren in an effort to teach and admonish them. However, if a worshipper focuses on singing so much that he is singing to please the senses rather than to please the Lord, he has strayed into sin.

Jesus addresses this problem in Matthew 6:1-18. He describes hypocrites who conspicuously contribute to the poor, pray, and fast so that they can be seen and praised by others. Jesus notes that the praise these hypocrites receive from their audience is the only praise they will ever have for their works. God is not pleased with the deeds done for men rather than for Him.

The use of this principle in song worship is obvious. If we think of worship as a way to impress others, we are sinning. The applications, though, cover a broad range of activities. Certainly, Jesus's words condemn the trained singer who seeks to impress others with the beauty of his voice. However, they also rebuke the woman or man who worships inaudibly because she is ashamed of her lack of talent, as well as the teenage boy who refuses to sing at all so that his friends don't think he's unmanly.

All of these people are suffering from a pride problem. They are more concerned about their image and the way others perceive them than they are with pleasing God. In their singing, they're focused on self and not on Him.

Pride also becomes an obstacle to worship when it produces **INGRATITUDE**. As Christians, we must recognize that every good thing in our lives is a gift from God (James 1:17) and that we succeed and prosper only through Him (Deuteronomy 8:2-3). If our hearts are quiet within us, we have no desire either to deny God the praise that He deserves or to claim that praise for our own.

However, when we become insecure and begin looking to glorify ourselves, giving God the glory is the first thing that suffers. This lack of thankfulness can emerge from almost any sphere of human activity. The businessman who gives himself the credit for his prosperity is just as guilty as the housewife who thinks of herself as a "good person" and doesn't REALLY believe that she would go to hell without the saving blood of Jesus.

Either of these attitudes, or many others besides, will destroy worship. Psalm 29:2 urges us, "Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name." God deserves all the glory we can give, and if we withhold any for ourselves, we are keeping back something that rightfully belongs to God. Our praise must overflow with thankfulness.

Understanding Worship Killers in Hearts.

1. What's the first main heart problem that can keep us from worshipping? Why does it appear?
2. Why is inattentiveness a symptom of this problem?
3. If we believe that hymns teach and admonish, what will we do with the hymns we sing?
4. What's the second main source of heart failure in worship?
5. Who commonly has this problem? Why?
6. Why is a focus on singing evidence of this problem?
7. Explain the root cause of ingratitude.

Applying Worship Killers in Hearts.

1. Where do you see yourself in this lesson?
2. Are the problems described here best treated on the level of the symptoms or of the cause?
3. How can we cope with apathy problems?
4. What help can the Bible offer us in our struggles with pride?

Sun of My Soul

#593 Praise for the Lord

Sun of my soul, Thou Savior dear, It is not night if Thou be near.
O my no earthborn cloud arise, To hide Thee from Thy servants eyes

When the soft dews of kindly sleep, My wearied eyelids gently steep
Be my last thought, how sweet to rest, forever on my Savior's breast

Abide with me from morn till eve, For without thee I can not live
Abide with me when night is nigh, for without thee I dare not die

Come near and bless us when we wake, Ere through the world our way we take
Till in the ocean of Thy love, We lose ourselves in heaven above.

1. Is this song based on any scripture or scriptures?
2. What do you think the author is trying to get us to see?
3. What does it mean "Sun of my soul"?
4. How useful is this hymn in worship?

