



But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. -

Matthew 15:9

invaindotheyworshipme.com

Introduction and Brief Mission Statement

My wife is asking me to take over maintaining this site, "In Vain do they Worship Me." I'm concerned that as a full-time employee with some volunteer duties on my plate I may not do it justice. But she has also asked me to write something for it this weekend, so maybe I'll introduced myself and give you some clues how I came to believe what I now believe.

I've always been something of an oddball. But being the first-born son of a preacher brought with it some pretty tall expectations and I grew up believing everything I was taught. That lasted into high school. I was a little young when I went away to boarding school for my freshman year, and physically well behind my age.

(Years later, when I was three years past high school graduation my mother told a staffer at another boarding school that I wasn't high school age. "Don't tell me he's still in eighth grade!" she exclaimed.)

Later in the year I was told that one of the male students had admitted "I wish I had the guts to be like Elkanah." Thing was, Elkanah didn't have the guts to be like Elkanah and I opted to act like the apparently unbelieving fellow students at a new boarding school halfway across the country (as a preacher my dad got moved around).

All of the schools were run by the denomination that hired my father. But they next sent me to a school affiliated with the denomination, but not run by it. This school was more conservative than the church-run schools, passing on accreditation so they could be more true to their narrow ideology. There I made

a choice to recommit to the church. I would stay there for years, even working as a teacher in church-run elementary schools for several years.

I attended the denomination's oldest university, obtaining a bachelor's degree because I never got around to deciding what else to do. While there I found myself facing controversy after controversy in the church. Had the church strayed from its Protestant heritage, as Geoffrey Paxton claimed? If you believed in a reformed life, were you engaging in John Harvey Kellog's pantheism?

During my senior year a professor from another church university challenged the church's teaching on the heavenly sanctuary. It's a very involved teaching that I won't have room to discuss here. But this professor claimed that what the church taught wasn't compatible with passages in the book of Hebrews which place Jesus at the right hand of the Father back when the book was written.

I saw the challenge as an opportunity for the church to reexamine what it taught and find new meaning and light with only slight adjustments. I didn't realize the history behind the doctrine and other people who had questioned it. The church demanded that this professor present his case to a board of church officials. We got a copy of the paper he presented at that meeting.

I read that paper with a sinking heart. Rather than challenge the church to look for advanced meaning by reinterpreting its position, he borrowed a trite interpretation of prophecy from outside the church. I hadn't yet encountered that interpretation, but I heard from others that it wasn't anything new. So I felt that this professor, who got pushed out of the denomination, had let us down by giving church leaders such an easy way to ignore the real issue.

Today I believe that the discussion I wanted would never have come, because that's the nature of any human organization. To change a teaching would be to admit that you had been wrong, and that is too much to ask of an organization that believes it has a divine mandate to survive. Humans seem incapable of seeing organizational survival past an admission of error.

No earthly denomination, regardless of the goals or insights of its founder(s), ever finds a way to keep learning and adjusting its approach to Godliness. And so I have come to believe that religion, as commonly practiced today, has little to offer members when it comes to a relationship with God.

What's a believer to do? We know we need relationships with others who share our goals. We need horizontal relationships as we pursue a better vertical

relationship. But if a local congregation owes allegiance to a denomination, there's likely to come a time when honest differences of opinion arise. Most denominations will demand that individual beliefs conform to the corporate dogma.

But to allow another human to decide what you believe is to put your eternal destiny in the hands of mere humans. This you must NEVER do. I have come to believe that the great harlot of Revelation 17 represents organized religion (she is pictured as the mother of harlots, making room for many groups to fit the passage's description of spiritual adultery). She rides the beast, a representation of civil government when it seeks to enforce religious ideals.

Force and coercion are elements of Satan's government, not of God's. When a denomination says you have to believe a certain way, or else, they are acting like Satan, not like God. The denomination I am leaving is trying to figure out how to discipline those church structures that have disobeyed a decision to deny ordination to gospel ministry to women. They are thus bringing Satan's methods into what should be sacred space. But if Satan's methods are there, the place cannot be sacred.

Godliness, God-like-ness, is the goal of every true believer. God is a God of grace, and we cannot emulate him until we learn to show grace to others. This picture of a God of grace and of unconditional love is what this site was established to uphold. Without that, a religion that seeks to teach ethical behavior to its members is truly teaching the commandments of men, and in that way their worship is meaningless and vain.

May God's love and blessings be upon you,

Elkanah