



What Religious Freedoms Do We Really Have? As

Americans, we are all very familiar with that great

charter of American freedom known as the Bill of

Rights. In particular, the first amendment is perhaps the most familiar to us whereby our

right of free speech, assembly, press, governmental petition and religion, are all clearly

affirmed. In short, we as Americans can go to church where we want and when we want.

But in recalling this crucial American truth, it seems that the more fundamental question

regarding our right and freedom to worship still remains unanswered. While we are all

free to worship God (as American citizens), we must still consider whether or not God

actually receives our worship. In other words, we may ask: "Are we using our freedoms

in a way that pleases God?" Consider for a moment the ancient precedent of worship

among the Jews in 1st century Palestine. The Roman Empire afforded the Jews adequate

religious freedom such that they could offer their worship in the temple in Jerusalem.

Their Sabbaths and their many religious holidays kept the city of Jerusalem bustling with

busy worshippers who came faithfully to the temple, enjoying their civil right to do so.

Now, recall with me a day in which a young rabbi entered the temple in Jerusalem during

one of the busiest holidays of the year: the Passover celebration, where nearly 3 million

Jewish pilgrims would come in order to offer their worship to God. Amidst all the

religious excitement, the hustle and bustle of this booming worship service, there was a

serious, and even violent disruption: A loud commotion erupted with the sounds of coins

dropping to the

ground, the loud crack of a whip; sheep, cattle and numerous people fleeing the temple,

while countless doves made their desperate escape from the temple courtyard. What

happened? An unexpected visitor came and disrupted the services by exposing the unacceptable expressions of worship in the temple. The disrupter's name: Jesus Christ, the Son of God (John 2:13-16). Consider the following observations regarding this important event: 1. These Passover worship services were protected by the secular laws and leaders of Rome and 2. The worship rendered was deemed as acceptable in the eyes of the religious leaders of that time and place, ***however the worship that was offered in the temple was regarded as detestable in the eyes of almighty God.*** Why? Because these specious worshippers were not rendering ***true worship*** to the ***true God***, rather they offered a form of worship that was created in the image of their own human wisdom and desires, thus converting the house of God into a shopping mall fully stocked with man-made religion. So what is acceptable worship in the sight of God? How shall we exercise our American religious freedoms in the name of Christ such that God is honored by our words and actions? We can address these questions with many texts of Holy Scripture, but let us briefly consider one in particular, written by that ancient monarch: King David. In Psalm 15:1 David considered this same important question regarding the matter of acceptable worship. As the psalm unfolds, David reviews the answers to his question about the acceptable worship of a godly person. Four descriptions of a true worshipper are then given: 1. He (the true worshipper) has a God-centered life (v. 2); 2. He loves his neighbor by forsaking gossip and evil hypocrisy (v. 3); 3. He has discernment in all aspects of his social life and commitments (v. 4) and 4. He does not use people for his own gain, but has genuine love and compassion for others (v. 5). Such a man will "never be shaken" (v. 5). In a sense, Psalm 15 sets aside all of the mechanisms

of “doing church” and gets to the heart of true worship by examining the worshipper’s relationship with God and with man. It is all too easy for us to “do church” through the hustle and bustle of activities and programs, but God calls His children to worship Him in Spirit and in Truth. *As His children, we are free to worship Him only in the manner that He has prescribed in His Word – this is the only way that the children of God can please their Heavenly Father (Ephesians 5:1-10).* For a more thorough treatment of this discussion of genuine worship (Psalm 15), please go to www.pilgrimbiblechurch.org. *Pastor Michael J. Beasley*