



“The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him” (John 4:23).

The Importance of Worship

Central Truth: God desires worship from His people.

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Topic: Worship.

What is it that distinguishes man from animal? It is man's capacity to worship! There is a “God-shaped blank” in every person that makes him incomplete without the worship of God. Man needs to worship; God desires man's worship.

Mere church attendance, Bible reading, and singing hymns are not worship. Worship is response-response to the person of God. It is seeking Him, finding Him, and adoring Him. True worship is essential to a dynamic spiritual life.

Therefore, we are devoting thirteen studies to the Bible's teaching on worship. The first three studies deal with the importance of worship, the God whom we worship, and a case study of a man at worship. The next eight lessons deal with elements of worship—with one study each given to Bible reading, music, giving, rituals, prayer, fellowship, praise, and preaching as acts of worship. The last two studies are a call for a revival of true worship and a review of the relationship between worship and service.

Someone may ask, “Why give a full quarter to a study of worship?” Here is why. (1) Worship is not natural for carnal human beings. Many Christians never worship even though they attend meetings called “worship services.” We need to be taught how to worship God. (2) We need to move from spectator to participant, finding ourselves “in the presence!” Worship develops a love relationship with God. (3) Worship recognizes and responds to the person of God. It says to Him, “Thou art worthy” (Luke 7:6). In

worship we take our rightful place before God: *“O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. For he is our God”* (Psalm 95:6, 7). (4) Worship produces response. When we truly worship, we “Enter to worship; Depart to serve.” True worship will revive our hearts, motivate our service, excite our witnessing, increase our offerings, arouse our affections, and build our churches.

Worship is the most important activity of your church. Jesus' disciples requested, *“Lord, teach us to pray”* (Luke 11:1); in like manner we should approach this study with the prayer, “Lord, teach us to worship.”

I. WORSHIP IS UNIVERSAL (John 4:19, 20)

Jesus' conversation with the oft-married woman of Samaria teaches us a great deal about worship. Though she had a personal life which was quite blemished, she recognized that worship is a natural response to the presence of God. Her Samaritan forebears taught that Samaria was the right place to worship. The Jews taught that true worship could be only in Jerusalem at the temple of God. But all of them realized that it is as natural for people to worship as it is for them to breathe.

No culture has ever been found, however savage and primitive it may have been, without a form of worship and an object of reverence. The object of worship might be anything from a “sacred” stone, tree, or idol to the true God of heaven; but people worship. The rituals of worship might vary from animal or human sacrifice, magic or superstition, to a pure worship “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24); but people worship.

Why is worship universal? Apparently God has written in man's inmost being the sense of the divine and the need to respond in worship to Him. He has revealed himself through nature so that people could know that He is (Romans 1:19, 20). The natural response to the person of God is worship of God. The person who does not worship is not acting like a normal person.

Worship is “worth-ship.” It is the act of ascribing worth, respect, reverence, or doing homage. The Greek form of the word literally means “to kiss toward,” involving both action and attitude—doing obeisance and expressing affection. A person might worship objects, ambitions, or even himself (his desires and preferences); but it would be far better for him to worship God. Whatever his object of worship, every person worships. It is universal in human experience.

II. WORSHIP IS SPIRITUAL (John 4:21-24)

One can go through all the rituals of worship (singing, praying, listening to a sermon, even responding to the invitation) and never truly worship. Worship involves relationship. Unless there is a personal transaction between your spirit and the Spirit of God, there is no true worship. That is why Jesus said, *“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth”* (John 4:24).

A. Spiritual worship is not restricted to a certain place (John 4:20, 21). There was a great controversy between the Jews and the Samaritans as to the place where God could be worshiped. The woman contrasted *“this mountain”* with *“Jerusalem”* as the sacred place to meet God. But Jesus dashed to the ground all such theories. *“Worship is not restricted to a particular place,”* He said. It is a matter of spirit, not of geography. God requires you to be neither at *“this mountain”* nor at *“Jerusalem.”* But He does require you to be conscious of His presence.

B. Spiritual worship is based on the truth (John 4:22, 24). Jesus rebuked worship without knowledge. He told the Samaritan woman, *“You do not know what you worship. God seeks those who worship Him in spirit and in truth.”*

The devotees of Baal were most sincere in their worship of the Baalim on Mount Carmel, but their worship was not according to truth. Therefore, it was not only useless, but it was also sinful. Hours of praying were not as effective as one minute of prayer which was offered according to the truth of God (I Kings 18).

Paul asks, *“How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?”* (Romans 10:14). True worship always involves biblical principles. That is why Bible study is so essential to a vital spiritual life.

C. Spiritual worship is internal. It is in the spirit of the believer and by the Spirit of God. Worship is spiritual; otherwise, it is not worship. Jesus said true worshipers must worship *“in spirit and in truth”* and that the Father was seeking those very persons to worship Him.

The danger of rituals in worship is that they can become an end in themselves. The fact that a person bows his head does not mean that he prays. He can sing a song without thinking about God, much less ascribing worth to Him. And that is true even in non-liturgical churches. Have you suddenly discovered the message in a song as you sang it without thought? Satan is not disturbed so long as we are satisfied with forms of worship. It is when we worship in spirit that he is threatened.

At the conclusion of each worship service we should be saying, *“Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us . . . , and while he*

opened to us the scriptures?” (Luke 24:32).

D. Spiritual worship is response to God, who is Spirit (John 4:24). “God is Spirit,” Jesus said. Therefore, the only way to commune with Him is in the spiritual realm. Those who worship “*must*” worship Him in spirit. That raises very serious questions. Is your worship genuine or in form only? Are you conscious of the Holy Spirit of God as you worship? Do you seek to meet God in worship and are dissatisfied if a worship service ends without your being consciously in His presence? The emotional intensity of each worship service will vary from the others, but there is no worship where there is no consciousness of God's presence.

Never become so familiar with God that you lose your sense of reverent awe. Do not substitute “attending church” for worship. The elements of a worship service—singing, praying, giving, preaching, fellowship—are ways to meet God and respond to His presence. They are not worship in themselves. Worship is not automatic. We must teach our children and our grandchildren how to worship God. Worship requires discipline.

Look back over what you have just read. Underscore in your heart the truth that worship is a spiritual exchange between you and God. Be content with nothing less. Remember God's words, “*Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart*” (Jeremiah 29:13). What difference will that make when you go to worship next Lord's Day?

III. WORSHIP IS PERSONAL (John 4:23, 25, 26)

There is an advantage of gathering in groups to worship. We can encourage one another by our presence, singing, testimonies, and instruction. But worship is so personal that being with a church congregation does not guarantee true worship.

A. Worship is directed to a personal God. God the Son spoke of worship of God the Father by God the Spirit. In worship we recognize the person of God, we ascribe to Him all His attributes, and we respond as the creature to the Creator. Worship directed to any other person or thing is idolatry and high treason against God. We worship God only.

B. Worship is offered by a reverent person. Jesus spoke of “*true worshippers*.” Even the most sacred rituals are as nothing when offered with a wrong spirit. In worship we “kiss toward” God and offer ourselves to Him. We proclaim, “*Thou art worthy*” (Revelation 5:9). We say it because we believe it. Then we go out and act like it. Carelessness in worship or impropriety in conduct is an insult to God and an enemy of worship.

IV. WORSHIP IS ESSENTIAL (I Chronicles 16:8-12)

There are two great principles which call us to worship. (1) We need it. (2) God deserves it.

We do need to worship. It keeps us humble. It strengthens us in spirit. It testifies to the world of our faith. It enables us to encourage fellow Christians. It magnifies our God. A deadness of the spirit rests upon the person who does not worship God in spirit and in truth.

God does deserve our worship. Remember the “Thou-art-worthy” theme which is woven through the Bible. Look at the angels in heaven as they gather around His throne and praise Him. Consider the twenty-four elders in Revelation 4 as they cast their crowns before God's throne and fall down before Him to confess His majesty and power. The inhabitants of heaven are ceaseless in their worship of God. How much more should the people of earth recognize Him and worship Him.

First Chronicles 16:8-12 tells how to worship God. It is to give thanks and bear witness to Him. It is to sing unto Him and talk of His wondrous works. It is to glory in His holy name and rejoice in seeking Him. It is to remember His marvelous works. It is to meet and respond to God as God.

Do you feel the need to worship? Do you feel a longing in your heart right now to reach out to God? Then do it! Worship is not a matter of location (at the church building) but of attitude (a heart-hunger for God). At home, at church, and in every place, *“Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness”* (Psalm 29:2).

Questions

1. What is worship?
2. How does Christian worship differ from that of other religions?
3. Why do we need to study Bible teachings on worship?
4. Why is some kind of worship universal among humanity?
5. What does it mean to “worship in spirit”?
6. What does it mean to “worship in truth”?
7. How is worship a response to the person of God?
8. In what way is worship personal?
9. Why is worship essential?
10. How can you “worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness”?

