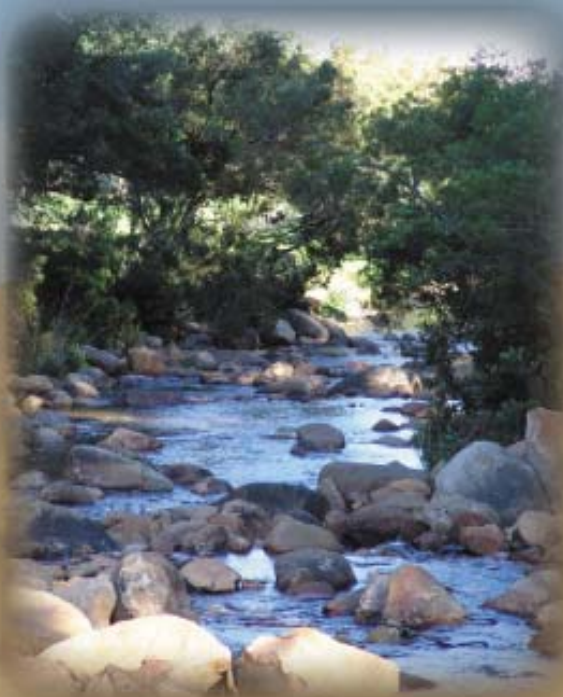


WORSHIP GOD



Worshiping The God Who Is Spirit
Through The Medium Of Our Spirit



DICKSON

Worship God

Roger E. Dickson

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INTRODUCTION

We live in a religiously confusing world wherein people have created every imaginable concept of some god that they worship. Because many have rejected the word of God, and yet seek to worship some invention of their own imaginations, they are left to their own choices concerning who their god would be. Unfortunately, and in the absence of the word of God, they are left to their own intellectual and emotional devices concerning the character and nature of their god. In the absence of any knowledge of the Bible, religious people simply turn to their own imagination and subsequently conclude that there is some “higher power” out there to which they should give reverence. For most, this relegates the created to being the creator of some “higher power” that is fabricated after the religious aspirations of misguided people of faith.

- **Without revelation from God, people create and worship false gods, or no god at all.** Religious people who refuse to be guided by the Bible in their understanding of who God is, leave themselves at a great disadvantage as to how they should express their worship. Apart from the direction of the Bible, they thus devise all sorts of forms and manners of worship, occult rites, rituals and ceremonies. Occultism is the result of religious people who have little or no regard for the Bible. Spiritism (or, spiritualism) is the fanaticizing of spirits and beings people suppose wander among the living in this world. Those of the occult and spiritualistic religions thus invent every sort of ritualistic meditation or worship that is pleasing to themselves in order to appease conjured up spirits.

This is the world in which we live. It is a world that is misguided by the zealous religionists who would seek to lead people after their own religious inclinations rather than the word of God. On the other hand, those who are guided by the word of God know better. This small remnant of faithful believers call all people of the world to come to a knowledge of the God of the Bible in order that they might worship

Him in spirit and in response to the truth of the gospel. Of this remnant, the Holy Spirit declared,

You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
(1 Peter 2:5)

This one statement of the Holy Spirit explains the nature of all Christians. They are the holy priesthood of faith. And thus in a world of innumerable created gods, they are spiritual beings trapped in clumps of dust, yearning to pour out their hearts in worship to their Creator. *“Therefore, by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name”* (Hb 13:15).

There is no prescription for worship. There is no command in the Bible to worship. What is commanded is who to worship. Worship is simply inherent in the nature of those who are people of faith. And since we are created in the image of God (Gn 1:26,27), this simple fact means that it is natural for the created to worship their Creator, the only true and living God. In fact, it is unnatural if the created do not worship the Creator.

Worship is natural, for it is inherent within the spirit of man.

From the very beginning of time when God first breathed into Adam the breath of life, Adam became a worshipful being. God put within Adam that which would naturally turn him to worship the One who gave him his first breath. Adam’s worship, therefore, was not programmed, commanded, or reduced to acted out rituals. It was simply innate in his spiritual nature that was in the image of God.

It is the same with us today. It is only natural for us, who are also created after the image of God, to worship our Creator. Our first definition of worship, therefore, is that **worship involves the response of our spiritual image that is within each of us. Worship spontaneously comes forth from all those who recognize the awesomeness of their Creator.** Worship, therefore, can never be about the worshipers. It is all about the One who created us as worshipful beings. If in any

situation worship turns to focusing on those who seek to narcissistically create that which is pleasing to themselves, then such worship is no longer true and acceptable to God. It is misdirected worship that fails to bring one to his or her knees in view of the awesomeness of the Creator.

• **People worshiped God before the Bible was written.** Before any verse of written Scripture was given to those who sought to walk by faith, people of faith worshiped God. Before God revealed any sacrificial expressions of worship, there was worship. And we might add that even before the invention of the guitar, there was worship. It is for this reason that worship is not defined by our ceremonial performances and orchestras that we would invent after our own desires and perform according to our own spiritual appetites. Worship is not noise that is generated by pumping noise into our ears or generated through “holy” environments in which one might sit on comfortable pews. It spontaneously explodes from our hearts anywhere and anytime. In these days of the pandemic, we must not forget this.

If there were no written revelation from God, then we would still be worshipful beings. However, without any revelation from God we are prone to invent some system or means by which to express our worship according to our own desires. Being human leads us to invent systems of worship that please the creature rather than the Creator.

There has never been a civilization discovered that has not had some form of religiosity and worship of either spirits or beings greater than the worshiper. Before the inscription of the first pages of Scripture that came forth from the hand of Moses, God’s people were guided through the instructions of the patriarchs (Hb 1:2,3). In this way most people of faith were protected from wandering off into idolatry. However, in those cultures of people who rejected the guidelines of the patriarchs, misguided worshipers created in their minds all sorts of evil (Gn 6:5), and subsequently worshiped the creature rather than the Creator (See Rm 1:21-25).

We were created to be worshipful beings, and thus, whether right or wrong, we will worship something. Because worship is within our

very being, God did not have to implant within us a robotic system to perform certain legal actions that we must do in order to worship Him. Neither did He program us to worship according to prescribed systems or ceremonies. We are sure that Abraham did not invent some stringed instrument before he could worship God. He simply worshiped.

We will worship regardless of any instructions from God to worship.

Since worshipful beings without revelation from God often lead themselves to invent religious rites, rituals or ceremonies in order to worship, God had to reveal guidelines that would guard us from worshiping that which we would create after their own imagination. Hand-sculptured idols would always direct the minds of people away from the one true and living God. They would do so because such idols represent the religion of the people who have already forsaken God.

Our problem is that we are free-moral beings who often harbor a spirit of rebellion. We thus misdirect our worship, or worship according to what pleases us emotionally. We become idolaters. We seek to be free from the restrictions of God, but at the same time, we have this innate desire to worship. The result of this inner turmoil within us has been a history of idolatry since the days when someone in our past took that first step away from the true and living God in order to live according to his own rules of worship. And in living according to his own rules, he invented customary rules of worship according to his own desires, and subsequently, passed these religious rites, rituals and ceremonies of worship on to us today. We are now laden with a history of worship performances that we believe we must obey in order to honor our forefathers.

- **We are cursed with spiritual idolatry.** An idolater first creates a god after his or her own self, and then, he or she creates a religion and worship that conforms to the carnal desires of humanity. The idolater first imagines a god who will condone his or her lifestyle. If one is living in immorality, then he or she will create a god who condones fornication, which thing was common in Greek idolatry, especially wor-

One must know God in order to worship Him acceptably.

ship surrounding the temple of Diana. It was common by the first century that many religions of that time established gods that would supposedly condone the sexual desires of the worshipers.

Nevertheless, from the first step that His people took away from His instructions, God started calling people back to worship Him alone. He sought to turn people away from their own carnal imaginations as to how they should worship a god that they had created after their own lustful desires.

God seeks to always bring us back to be true worshipers (Jn 4:23). In order to direct our restoration to true worship, God has revealed the vanity of humanly invented schemes of worship. In revealing the vanity of such worship schemes, it is God's call to all people of faith to return to worship Him in spirit and truth.

We live in a world of religion wherein denominated religious groups are defined by a confused assortment of worship rituals and ceremonies that are often contrary to the true worship that is defined in the Bible. It is unfortunately assumed by the vast majority of those who call themselves after the name "Christian," that God accepts all sorts of expressions of worship, regardless of the behavior of the worshiper or his or her beliefs. Unfortunately, such thinking has produced a wide spectrum of what is defined as worship in the religious world today.

At the time when Jesus was incarnate in this world, many of the Jewish religious leaders had created their own systematic theology of worship. Such worship was a part of the Jews' religion (See Gl 1:13). But Jesus referred to their worship as "vain worship" (See Mk 7:1-9). In reference to the idolatrous worship of the Gentiles, Paul used the term "self-made" worship. We would conclude, therefore, that God does not accept all worship, regardless of the sincere emotional outpouring on the part of the worshiper.

• **We must seek acceptable worship.** Simply because something is defined as worship by zealous religionists does not mean that this worship is acceptable to God. We must not forget that God will allow us to blindly perform what we consider to be acceptable worship, but actually we have self-deceived ourselves into believing that our wor-

ship ceremonies are true and acceptable to God (See 2 Th 2:10-12). It is not the work of God the Holy Spirit to make us worship correctly. If the Holy Spirit were the origin of our worship, then the worship would be from Him, not ourselves. He would be motivating someone to worship Himself, which thing some people indeed believe. Emotionally chaotic behavior that is passed off as worship is the definition of self-deception. We do not worship a God of chaos, “*for God is not a God of confusion*” (1 Co 14:33). He is a God of order, and thus, in reference to our worship we must “*let all things be done properly and in order*” (1 Co 14:40).

We live in a confused world of worshipers who have created vain and misleading worship that is imposed on millions of sincere people throughout the world. If the Holy Spirit is the author or source of such confusion, then we have accused the Spirit of dividing, rather than uniting, all believers in this matter. Our only escape from this confusion of misguided worship is to identify, or verify our worship in the pages of the Holy Spirit inspired word. When we study the sincere worship of men and women of faith in the Bible, then we begin to understand that our religious world is full of confusion concerning true worship. But when our worship of God is validated by His instructions, we are assured that He accepts our worship. It is only natural for the sons of God to seek His approval in all things that are done in reference to worship. So for this reason, sincere sons of God are seriously into the word of God in order that they not stray from the object of their reverence. Those who are ignorant of the word of God can be assured that their worship is in some ways twisted in reference to what God desires.

We can deliver ourselves from worship confusion only by study of the Bible.

In reference to worship, the Bible speaks more of what one should not do in worship, rather than offer a legal prescription for performing worship. The word of God is a guide to keep us away from creating a god after our own imagination, and thus creating worship after our imagined gods. Israel had a historical problem with this because she was influenced by the idolatrous nations around her. We likewise live in a world where we are surrounded by a world of religious gods whose

worshippers would deceive us into thinking that we as Christians should worship as they worship their twisted imagination of the God of Heaven. Therefore, we study the Old Testament prophets in order not to be led astray as Israel was led astray. We study our New Testaments in order to understand the true worship that God is seeking from us.

The Bible was not given for the purpose of giving us a legal system of worship by which we would be assured before God that we are worshiping God correctly if we perform certain rites or ceremonies of worship. Revelation was given in order that we first know the one true and living God. And in knowing Him, we, through a knowledge of His revelation to us, will pour out our hearts in worship that is in spirit and truth.

Chapter 1

WORDS ON WORSHIP

The word “worship” refers to giving someone or some thing worth in respect, devotion, reverent love and adoration. Worship can be offered to the imaginations that people have created in their own minds. These imaginations are often formed into a material object that reminds one of some god or spirit that he or she has fabricated after one’s self. The Old Testament is filled with numerous examples of those who worshiped the creations of their own minds and craftsmanship of their own hands. In this way, these people were considered by God to be idolatrous in their religiosity. Such examples of idolatry were recorded by the Holy Spirit in order to remind us not to go down that religious road (See Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:11).

What we first learn from the examples of idolatry in the Old Testament is that we must caution ourselves concerning our own worship. Second, the Old Testament examples of idolatrous worship remind us that not all worship is true and acceptable to God. And since all worship is not true and acceptable, then we are encouraged to seriously check our own worship with the word of God lest we be worshipping some figment of our imagination, or conducting ourselves in worship after the same example of those who formerly were referred to by God as Baal idolaters.

It is for the preceding reasons that we must be diligent Bible students on this subject. Fortunately, there are some key expressions in Scripture that give us a preliminary definition of true worship that comes forth from the heart of those who seek to reverence God in worship:

**Worship is
natural for
those who
recognize
their Creator.**

- “*As the deer pants after the water brooks, so pants my soul after You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God*” (Ps 42:1,2).
- “*O God, You are my God. Early I will seek You. My soul thirsts for You. My flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water*” (Ps 63:1).
- “*All the earth will worship You and will sing to You*” (Ps 66:4).
- “*My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God*” (Ps 84:2).
- “*O come and let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker*” (Ps 95:6).
- “*I stretch forth my hands to You. My soul thirsts after You as a thirsty land*” (Ps 143:6).

Worship is the craving of the soul of man to honor the source of his existence. It is praise and adoration that pours forth from the human spirit in appreciation for the Divine preservation of one’s existence. Worship involves veneration and homage, emotion and intellect that instinctively flows from the inner soul of the created for the Creator. It is not something that is ceremonialized through prescribed actions and rituals, but spontaneously offered up by spiritually responsive worship warriors who recognize in their hearts the work of God in their lives.

In our quest to restore true worship in a world that is filled with so much confusion by those who have little knowledge of God and His word, it is imperative that we keep our worship in check by a vigorous study of the Bible. It would only seem logical that those who seek to pour out their hearts to God would naturally seek to base their worship on the foundation of the One whom they would seek to serve. In order to begin our search for true worship, therefore, there are several words in the Bible, both in Hebrew and Greek, that are used in reference to worship.

A. Worship is bowing down before God.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word that is most often used to define worship is *shahah*. The root meaning of this word refers to

bowing down. Though not in a context of worship, when in Palestine, Abraham bowed down (*shahah*) to the people of the land, “*even to the children of Heth*” (Gn 23:7). He did so in order to manifest respect and honor.

The word *shahah* was also used in a worship context when Abraham went to the place where he was commanded by God to offer his son. Upon his arrival at the place of offering, he told his servants, “*Stay here with the donkey. I and the lad will go there and worship [shahah]*” (Gn 22:5). In this worship context, the word *shahah* is used to express an inward bowing down of the heart that was manifested by a literal prostrating of the body of the worshiper on the ground. Inherent in the Hebrew word *shahah* when used in a worship context is that the worshiper actually bows down both physically and emotionally. In the Old Testament context where the word is used, the worshiper actually bowed prostrate before the Lord, often on the ground. The worshiper bowed because he had first “bowed down” in his heart.

When one’s heart bows to God in worship, his knees will follow.

- “*Then the man bowed down his head and worshiped the Lord*” (Gn 24:26).
- “*And I bowed down my head and worshiped the Lord, and praised the Lord God of my master Abraham*” (Gn 24:48).
- “*Now it came to pass when Abraham’s servant heard their words, that he worshiped the Lord, bowing himself to the ground*” (Gn 24:52).
- “*They bowed their heads and worshiped*” (Ex 4:31; see 12:27).
- “*And Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped*” (Ex 34:8).
- “*And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped*” (Ja 5:14).
- “*Then Job arose and tore his robe. And he shaved his head and fell down on the ground and worshiped*” (Jb 1:20).
- “*O come and let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker*” (Ps 95:6).

The word *shahah* expresses the natural reaction of the created to-

ward the Creator. True worship, therefore, must be manifested in one humbling himself before God, and such humbling is expressed by bowing to the ground. Though one may not always have the opportunity to physically bow down, the bowing down in one's heart is certainly present in the heart of the true worshiper.

The metaphorical application of *shahah* in worship would certainly speak contrary to what is often practiced in some assemblies wherein attendees writhe out of control while being entertained by a "church band." If one does not understand the importance of the preceding Bible statements in reference to reverential worship, then he or she may be having difficulty understanding the response of thanksgiving that one should have for the grace of God. If one is involved in an entertainment assembly, then one's pleasure to be entertained always hinders him from having God as the sole focus of worship. Paul expressed this in the following statement: "*For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God*" (2 Co 4:15). It is grace that causes worshipful thanksgiving, not "church bands."

B. Worship is "kissing toward" the Lord.

There are several Greek words used in the New Testament to explain the emotion of worship. The most common is *proskuneo*. This word means "to kiss toward." It is used fifty-nine times in the New Testament and is always translated "worship." Without the prefix "*pro*," the word would simply mean "to kiss."

Proskuneo was an ancient custom of the Persians. They would bow down before and kiss the hand of the king to show respect and honor. The word eventually took on a metaphorical meaning, and thus, the physical action was dropped. When we come to the incarnational Son of God, *proskuneo* was used by Jesus when He explained that the true worshipers (*proskuneo*) would worship the Father in spirit and truth (Jn 4:23). True worshipers would "kiss toward" the Father in spirit and truth in order to show awe, respect and honor. In fact, and on one occasion when the disciples finally realized that they were in the pres-

ence of One who could command the mighty wind, Matthew recorded, “*Those who were in the boat worshiped [proskuneo] Him, saying, ‘Truly, You are the Son of God’*” (Mt 14:33).

One can physically bow down as a manifestation of honor without having a heart of worship. However, one cannot have a heart of worship without bowing down and “kissing toward” the King of all things. The soldiers of Pilate’s court *proskuneo* (bowed down) before Jesus at the time of His trials, but they did not worship Him (Mk 15:19). An outward physical expression of *proskuneo*, therefore, does not necessarily infer worship. But when people come into the presence of God, it is only natural that they *proskuneo*.

- “*Now when they had come into the house, they [the wise men] saw the young Child with Mary His mother. And they fell down and worshiped [proskuneo] Him*” (Mt 2:11).
- “*You will worship [proskuneo] the Lord your God and Him only will you serve*” (Mt 4:10).
- “*Let all the angels of God worship [proskuneo] Him*” (Hb 1:6).

C. Worship is a life-style of reverencing God.

The second most used Greek word in the New Testament in reference to worship is the word *sebomai*. This word is used ten times in the New Testament and refers to reverence, or to considering something with great awe. The original meaning of *proskuneo* emphasized the outward manifestation of worship in bowing down, while *sebomai* focuses more on the inward soul of man and one’s response to the awesomeness of the Creator. “*Now a certain woman named Lydia ... worshiped [sebomai] God*” (At 16:14). Titius Justus was “*one who worshiped [sebomai] God*” (At 18:7; see vs 13; compare At 19:27). It was the nature of Lydia and Titius to worship God. It was not so much something that they did at a particular time, but something they were in their daily lives. They were people of worship. Because they were *sebomai* in their hearts, they *proskuneo* before God daily.

**The obedient life
is defined
by worship.**

D. Worship is serving in response to the Lord.

The third Greek word that is used in the New Testament in reference to worship is *latreuo*. This word means “to render religious service,” “give homage,” or simply, “to worship.” In the strictest sense of the definition of the word reference is to the worshiper offering gifts or service in response to one’s reverence of God. Paul wrote, “*But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship [latreuo] the God of my fathers*” (At 24:14). “*For we are the true circumcision who worship [latreuo] God in spirit*” (Ph 3:3). In both of these contexts, the word *latreuo* could be translated “serve.” Because of one’s life-style (*sebomai*), he offers service to God (*latreuo*) by serving others. From the use of this word in reference to worship, we have developed the concept of “worship service.” This was the thought that Paul sought to convey when he made the following statement: “*Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service*” (Rm 12:1; more later). Instead of “reasonable service,” at least one translation reads, “true and proper worship” (NIV).

From the definitions of the words that are used in the Bible in reference to worship, we would conclude that worship is inward, not outward, though worship can be expressed in certain outward actions and behavior, such as bowing down in homage or serving in thanksgiving for the grace of God. Such things as singing and praying are not within themselves worship, but only the outward expressions of an inward appreciation and adoration of God. When one partakes of the Lord’s Supper, one’s hands and mouth are used in eating and drinking. But partaking of the Supper in eating and drinking is not worship.

No action of the worshiper to express worship is worship in and of itself. If such outward actions did constitute worship, then the worshipers could involve themselves in all sorts of ceremonial acts of worship, and then call the performance

Thanksgiving to God is expressed through sacrificial service.

of such acts to be worship. It is for this reason that the phrase “acts of worship” can be very misleading. Self-deceived people can convince themselves that they have truly worshiped God after they have legally performed what they consider to be “acts of worship.”

For example, one can certainly partake of the Lord’s Supper and sing without worshipping. One can help his neighbor by serving his needs without doing so in worship of God. Unbelievers help their neighbors, but they do not do so in worship of God. We must keep in mind, therefore, that one can worship without any outward expressions or actions. Worship is internal, and specifically, individual. Worship pours forth from the heart without necessarily being manifested by any outward behavior in an assembly. The aged crippled widow sitting idle in her rocking chair alone at home can be worshipping truly in her heart. The only evidence of her worship may be a single tear flowing down her face. True worship can take place when one is alone in a closet, or in the presence of an assembly in an auditorium.

Though worship is internal and mental, it often finds its expression in one’s behavior. This is the meaning of Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 11:29: “*For he who eats and drinks not discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment to himself.*” The problem is that at the same time some in Corinth were externally eating and drinking the Lord’s Supper, they had carnal feelings in their hearts. If one eats and drinks with a carnal heart, then he or she is not worshipping. Actions, therefore, can never be the signal of true worship, or even worship itself.

However, worship can be expressed in the behavior of one’s life. It is for this reason that external crutches that are used to generate worship in the heart, as physical environments, solemn ceremonies, burning incense, and special sanctuaries, often present a false sense of worship simply because those who rely on such external crutches have often not first given their hearts in worship of God. After the euphoria of the concert, for example, many who are motivated externally to worship are back to their same behavior and life-style Monday morning at the job. They performed a ceremony of acts of worship during the “worship hour” on Sunday morning that did not result from the daily outpouring of an inner worship that they lived every day of their lives.

Entertained religionists often experience a momentary mesmerizing euphoria, but true worship does not seek to be entertained, neither does it subside after the “closing prayer.” True worshipful hearts exist daily regardless of any external stimuli.

True worship cannot be confined to places or limited by performances.

Worshipful saints can bring their spirit of worship together in assemblies. However, if our thinking is that we go to the “hour” and “place” of worship in order to be stirred into worship through performances by ourselves or others, then we have missed the point. Worship must take place in an individual’s heart regardless of his or her presence with others, and in particular, before entering into any “place of worship.”

Unfortunately, we live in a pandemic time when previously “worship” was too often confined to places, times, ceremonies and entertaining assemblies. It is all now different has millions of believers around the world are confined to their homes, and thus, cannot perform what was previously considered “true” worship. These are times in which believers must dig deep into their own hearts in order to discover hidden treasures of worship that have been buried for years under the rubbish of ceremonial religiosity.

We must never forget that true worship has always characterized the spiritual nature of God’s people. True worship has always been poured out from godly hearts regardless of where the believer was when he or she had a moment of inspiration to worship. True worshipers have always worshiped anywhere and anytime. Worship warriors always worship God individually first in their hearts. Worship with others was only a serendipity as believers would come together in a common fellowship with one another, or when two or more believers had the opportunity to be in one another’s presence. Worship has always existed within the heart of the faithful regardless of any opportunity to be in the presence of others. After all, worship in the lives of godly believers as Enoch, Noah, Abraham and David existed thousands of years before there was such a thing as “Christian assemblies.”

Chapter 2

THE FOCUS OF OUR WORSHIP

We certainly live in a religious world today of confusion in reference to worship. In the non-Christian world, people seem to worship every imaginable god in every conceivable manner. God created us to be worshipful beings. If one does not know the God of the Bible, then we are driven inwardly to make up some god to worship. For this reason, we would assume that God would reveal Himself to us and how we should worship Him.

And He did. From the very beginning of time, God revealed Himself through the fathers of extended families long before His revelation of Himself came to mankind through the written words of the Bible (Hb 1:1,2). The vast majority of the religious world today, however, have little or no faith in the Bible. As a result, religious people have moved themselves back in history before God offered the gift of written revelation of who He is and how He can be approached in worship. The result of this move is that we now live in a world today that is populated with religious people who neither know God, nor have any desire to study His written revelation in order to discover how He desires to be worshiped.

This would be true also of much of the world of Christendom wherein many assert to be “Christian,” but have little knowledge of the word of God. From a Barna Group report that was taken over a decade ago, an interesting point came forth from studies in reference to the religiosity of the American culture: “The Christian Church,” the report stated, “is becoming less theologically literate. What used to be basic, universally-known truths about Christianity **are now unknown mysteries to a large and growing share of Americans ... especially young adults**” (Dec. 13, 2010). Notice the date of this study. The problem concerning a lack of Bible-based faith has progressively become worse in America since the time of the survey.

**Ignorance of who
God is leads to
worship of Him
in ignorance.**

In their ignorance of the word of God, many “believers” of Christendom of the West would just as soon create worship after their own desires, assuming that the worship they create is pleasing to the God of whom they have little knowledge. As one ventures from one assembly of worshipers to another, he is confronted with an assortment of worship behavior, most of which is questionable in view of the worship that we find revealed in and defined by the word of God.

One cannot worship God acceptably without a knowledge of who God is.

Simply because someone worships, does not mean that their worship is acceptable to God, especially if they have little knowledge of the gospel. There are too many warnings in the Bible concerning false worship to allow ourselves to be biblically ignorant of the word of God in reference to our own worship. It should be obvious, therefore, that if one claims to be a child of God, then he or she would search the Scriptures in order to guard himself from worshipping after the ordinances of man.

Acceptable worship means that there is unacceptable worship.

When we study the Bible in reference to worship, we must keep in mind that it is not necessary that we be taught to worship God. Worship is a natural instinct because we were all created after the image of God. In fact, it is actually unnatural not to worship. It is for this reason that the Bible was not given as a legal manual for correct legal ceremonies of worship. From our study of the Bible, we do not learn how to be inspired to worship. We learn **who** to worship, for faithful people worshiped God long before the Bible was produced. When one learns who God is, he or she naturally turns his or her worship toward the one and only true God.

There is no need for a command to worship, since worship of God is inherently natural for obedient saints.

We must mention in this context that in ignorance of the word of God, no one can sluff off his or her worship behavior on the Holy Spirit. In the context of worship, some today often confuse their spirit with the Holy Spirit. This is true because **there is no statement in Scripture that affirms that our worship is to be directed by the Holy Spirit.** If

our worship were so directed, then we must conclude that the worship of all believers for thousands of years before the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 was somewhat flawed, or misdirected. However, we are not prepared to say that either Noah, Abraham or any of the other Old Testament patriarchs were flawed in their worship because they were not supposedly directed in their worship by the Holy Spirit

At the same time some are affirming that their worship is Holy Spirit-driven or directed, they are quoting the Psalms of David, who at the time of his writing the Psalms, was not directed in worship. Only what he **wrote** in the Psalms was Holy Spirit-directed.

If one feels inadequate today about his or her worship, then the Holy Spirit cannot be blamed. Inspiring worship in our hearts is simply not the work of the Holy Spirit. If it were, then certainly the Holy Spirit must be confused because of the tremendous diversity of worship behavior that is witnessed today in assemblies throughout the world. And if it is the work of the Holy Spirit to inspire worship, then we would question why He does not do so equally among all the assemblies of the saints.

**It has never been
the work of the
Holy Spirit
to inspire worship.**

One must not become confused in understanding the assembly text of 1 Corinthians 12 - 14. In the context, prophecy was not an indication of Holy Spirit-inspired worship, but Holy Spirit-inspired teaching of the word of God for the edification of the assembly. Since there were no Bibles in those days among the churches, Paul and the other apostles had to lay hands on selected individuals in order that the word of God be taught among the disciples (See At 8:18; Rm 1:11).

Likewise, “tongues” (languages) was also not an indication of Holy Spirit-inspired worship. It was an indication of Holy Spirit-inspired guidance in speaking another language in order that everyone in the socially mixed Corinthian assembly could understand what was being said. To assert that either prophecy or languages were manifestations of Spirit-inspired worship is to miss the entire practical meaning of what Paul was addressing in the contexts of 1 Corinthians 12 - 14.

As will be discussed latter, there is such a thing as vain worship (Mt 15:8,9) and self-made worship (Cl 2:20,23). There is worship that

is focused on the creature rather than the Creator (Rm 1:18-32). Because there is worship that is not acceptable to God, sincere believers should be driven to know the true worship that is acceptable (Jn 4:23,24). The only way one can possibly understand who to worship, is to discover the one true and living God who is revealed in the Bible. **Anyone who does not accept the Bible as the word of God, therefore, cannot worship acceptably the God of the Bible.** Though the one who is ignorant of the word of God will worship, he is never sure that his worship is acceptable to God simply because he does not know the God of the Bible.

The devout Cornelius of Caesarea “*always prayed to God*” (At 10:2). An angel eventually appeared to him and revealed to him that “*your prayers and alms have come up for a memorial before God*” (At 10:4). We must keep in mind that this Cornelius, though a Gentile, was living in a culture wherein the true God of Israel was distinguished from the idol gods that were worshiped throughout the Roman Empire.

Throughout the Empire, however, and in their ignorance of the word of God, idolaters worshiped the sun, moon and stars, and numerous other imaginations of men. Some worshiped angels, or gods they assumed controlled fire and seas. But it is as the angel instructed John when John bowed down before him, “*Worship God*” (Rv 19:10; 22:8,9). John was not instructed to worship. That he was already doing after being overcome by the visions that he experienced. He was instructed by the angel **who** to worship. Jesus even reminded Satan, “*You will worship the Lord your God and Him only will you serve*” (Mt 4:10).

Since there is only one God, then worship is to be directed only to this God.

In the Old Testament we have recorded history of how people worshiped the gods of Baal, Molech and a host of other imagined gods the people had created after their own creativity. All such worship was misdirected, and thus, it was worship that was unacceptable to God. In fact, the prophets chided the people for worshiping the man-made images of their imagined gods (See Is 2:8; 10:10,11; 44:9-20; 45:20; Jr 2:28; compare 1 Kg 18:17-46).

Worship in its purest form is revealed by God in His word. Since

there is no other Creator, then certainly the One who created all things would be the One who should be worshiped by the created. It is for this reason that philosophies as evolution destroy man's desire to worship God. If we were not the result of a creating God, then we could conclude that we have no inward desire to worship a Creator. When humanists stop worshiping the Creator, they start worshiping the creation (See Rm 1:18-32).

Since God revealed that imagined gods are false, and thus the worship of them is unacceptable, then we conclude that there is an acceptable way to worship God. It is the task of those who claim to be believers in the one true God to discover acceptable worship. Since God is our Creator, then we would correctly concluded that He has the right to be worshiped according to His instructions, not according to our carnal worship inventions.

Chapter 3

IN SEARCH OF TRUE WORSHIPERS

(Part 1)

When the Samaritan woman encountered Jesus outside the village of Samaria, Jesus' conversation with her eventually led to a very profound statement in reference to worship. Jesus said,

*“But the hour is coming and now is when the **true worshipers** will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, **for the Father seeks such to worship Him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth**”* (Jn 4:23,24).

Since Jesus said, *“for the Father seeks such to worship Him,”* we must conclude that the Father is on a search for “true worshipers.” It is significant to notice that His search is for individuals, not for ceremonies or acts that the true worshipers might perform in worship of Him. Therefore, the focus of the Father's search is for worshiping people, not legal ceremonies of worship.

In the context of the John 4 statement, Jesus generally defined the people for whom the Father seeks. These are those who worship in spirit and in truth. Worship in spirit is based on the simple fact that God is spirit. The obvious conclusion to this fact is that

God, who is spirit, is worshiped by that which is spirit.

God is not seeking the mechanical inventions, sanctuaries, or legal forms of ceremonial performances of what we might consider to be worship. All such things originate from the material world that was created. The Creator, therefore, did not create instruments or physical environments by which, or in which, He would be worshiped. Therefore, regardless of the ingenuity of people to invent or perform according to man's hands, God who is spirit, cannot be worshiped with that which is the result of His creation. Nothing mechanical or material that is of this world, therefore, can be used to worship Him who is not of this world. Only that which is after the image of God—the spirit of man—can offer worship to the Father of our spirits (Hb 12:9). Therefore, God seeks for those who connect with Him in worship through the spirit.

At the risk of being redundant, it is erroneous for one to claim to use something of this physical world in order to worship God who is spirit, and thus, not of this world. God did not create a physical world of instruments with which He expects those who worship Him to use in their worship of Him. On the contrary, He created after His image the spirit that is within man. It is with the medium of this spirit that He seeks to be worshiped. Therefore, in our efforts to understand how to worship God in spirit we must lay aside all presumptions that we can use something of this world in order to worship the God who is not of this world. Unless we can break ourselves away from the confines of the physical world, we will never connect with the Father of our spirits.

All aids or environments one might create in order to generate a worshipful spirit within himself are of no value in worshiping our God

True worshipers need no earthly crutches to stimulate worship.

who is spirit. Stain glassed windows, curtains and candles, and the sound of organs, guitars and drums mean nothing to God. In His search for true worshipers, God is not listening for the noise of pianos or looking through stained glass windows in order

to hear or discover worshipful hearts. Being in existence in spirit, He is unconcerned with material creations that are the product of our hands. This is the very point that Paul made to the idolatrous worshipers of Athens:

*“The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, **does not dwell in temples made with hands** [sanctuaries]. **Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands** [idols and instruments] **as though He needed anything** [from man], since He gives life to all, breath and all things” (At 17:24,25).*

Understanding this one profound statement of Scripture is enough to convince us that **any efforts on our part to worship God with the inventions of our hands cannot be acceptable to God**. This means that all handmade mechanical inventions, elaborate building structures, “holy” images, incense, decorated sanctuaries, or anything that is the product of our hands, cannot be used to worship God. Such things may be used to produce an elaborate atmosphere wherein people seek to praise God. But we must never forget that we are to worship God through the medium of our spirit, not via something that is the product of our hands. We must also not forget that the One who gives life to all cannot be worshiped by that which has no life.

**He who is truth
is worshiped
only by those
who walk in
response to the
truth of the gospel.**

Praise and worship are not the same, though in our worship we can praise God. However, when we say, “praise the Lord” before the unbeliever, we are giving a testimony concerning our faith. We are not moving into a state of worship before the unbeliever before whom we have personally testified that our God should be glorified in all things.

Praise can be offered to God before unbelievers, but our praise of God does not take the place of our worship. This helps us to understand what David wrote in Psalm 150:

Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet. Praise Him with the psaltery and harp. Praise Him with the timbrel and dance. Praise Him with

stringed instruments and flutes. Praise Him on the loud cymbals. Praise Him on the high sounding cymbals (Ps 150:3-5).

Now consider the ability to offer such praise to God with mechanical inventions. Remember that all the “noise” that is produced by the instrument is not for God, but for ourselves. God is not deaf. Since every person can worship, not every person can praise God with the skill of using a trumpet, harp, timbrel, flute or stringed instrument. Since such instruments can be used in pagan rock concerts, then there is no inherent spiritual meaning in such instruments, or their inherent noise. If one were to use such in praise of God, then the melody of the instruments is only the expression of the one who plays. There is no praise inherent in a flute.

Worship of God in spirit is the foundation of Paul’s statement in Ephesians 5:19. In the spirit of song, we speak vocally to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Paul wrote that in this form of communication to one another, we are also “*singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.*” The one who is using physical or mechanical inventions to express worship must realize that God does not consider such material inventions to inherently take the place of one’s heart, nor is He impressed with any of our worship ceremonies wherein the atmosphere is as a rock concert. In the statement of Ephesian 5:19, Paul wanted to remind his readers that God is listening to the hearts of those who are using the instrument of their voices to communicate praises to Him.

God is thus worshiped with hearts, not with harps. Unfortunately, in many situations the harps have turned into an orchestra or band with amplifiers that drown out both the communication of the saints with one another in song, as well as taking the place of voicing words of praise in spirit to God from the melody of our hearts. God can certainly hear the melody of the hearts above the obnoxious clanging of the mechanical instruments, but it is questionable whether the worshipers can accomplish audible speaking to one another through song when the worshipers cannot hear one another because of the clamor of the instruments that are amplified through rock concert amplifiers.

We must keep in mind also that David's reference to musical instruments in Psalm 150 was not used in reference to an assembly context. David was alone when he offered up the music of an instrument. There was nothing equivalent to a "Christian assembly" among the rural Jews of Palestine. Their use of instruments in praise was individual. No Jew played his instrument for an audience in an assembly.

Worship in spirit involves both attitudes and motives in the heart of the worshiper. It is worship that is motivated by a sincere desire on the part of the worshiper to give homage to the Creator of our spirit. Handmade inventions as mechanical instruments, sanctuaries, idol images and incense have nothing to do with worship that pours forth from one's heart.

Worshippers today may have become inept at stirring worship in their hearts without the aid of something that appeals to their own senses. But true worshippers are not spiritually handicapped with physical things, and thus, they are not in need of any empirical crutches to generate an atmosphere or spirit of worship. True worship in spirit is spontaneous. It is individual. It comes from the naked heart of a gospel-obedient saint and is poured out individually and directly to one's Creator and Savior. It does not depend on an environment in which one is or the sound that comes to his ears, or the images presented before his eyes, or the aromas that appeal to the senses of his nose. True worshippers worship because they respond to who God is, and thus they communicate in worship to Him in spirit.

- God is spirit, and thus, one must worship Him in the holiness of one's spirit (See 1 Ch 16:29; Ps 29:2; 30:4; Is 62:9).
- God is a benevolent spirit, and thus, those who worship Him must worship with a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving for the gospel of His grace (See Ps 100:1-3; 2 Co 4:15; Js 1:17).
- God as spirit reigns over all things, and thus He must be worshiped with a spirit of reverence and awe (See Is 6:1-5; Rv 1:12-18).
- God is a spirit of wisdom and intelligence, and thus, He must be worshiped with the focus of our mental abilities (See Mt 15:7-9; 22:37).
- God is a spirit that cannot be seen with our eyes, and thus, He must be

worshiped in faith (See Ex 20:4,5; 2 Co 5:7).

- God is a loving spirit, and thus, He must be worshiped with a spirit of love for Him and one's fellow worshipers (Mt 5:23,24; 1 Jn 4:8,11,20,21).
- God is a forgiving spirit, and thus, those who worship Him must have a forgiving spirit (Mt 6:14,15).
- God is a fatherly spirit, and thus, He is to be worshiped as a child who trusts in and is dependent upon the Father of our spirits (Mt 6:9; Hb 12:9).

We believe in a God who needs no handmade invention of this world in order to be worshiped by those who are confined to this world. If we would thus seek to worship God, then we must link with Him through our own spirits. We must transcend all that is physical of this world in order to come into the purity of His spiritual nature. The less we encumber ourselves with that which is carnal and physical, the greater we access the mental and spiritual realm wherein we can worship God, our Creator.

Chapter 4

IN SEARCH OF TRUE WORSHIPERS

(Part 2)

Since all that God is is real and true, then certainly if one would approach God in worship, then he would seek to understand the God he desires to worship. We would assume, therefore, that God would reveal the truth of who He is in order that we worship Him in truth. The problem with people and their inventions of worship is that they often become subservient to their religious inventions with which they assume that God is pleased. Consequently, the inventions often take over and the worshipers become servants to their own inventions. This is the spirit and behavior of idolatry.

The idolater creates a god after his own imagination, and then he assumes that his created god seeks to be worshiped with his own cre-

ations, as well as his own self-sanctifying ceremonies or acts of worship. The crutches of worship by which the idolater seeks either to perform or to create an atmosphere of worship, is thus presumed to be necessary in order that the worshiper perform his or her worship. The crutches take over and the idolater subsequently cannot worship his or her god without all the crutches. It is for this reason that when the idolatrous worshiper has been restricted from his or her environment of worship, or from performing what is believed to be necessary for worship, the idolatrous worshiper is quite frustrated. As he or she sits at home in confinement, there is a sense of guilt that one is barred from worshipping correctly.

Since God seeks to be worshiped in truth, we would correctly conclude that those who do not know Him would invent their own means by which they would try to worship Him. Those who have little knowledge of the word of God, therefore, submit themselves to a spirit of idolatry. This spirit of idolatry leads them to create gods they can understand and manipulate. Once they have created the god, they then assume that the god they have created in their minds seeks to be worshiped according to their own desires. This was the religious world of the first century into which the incarnate Son of God came, and to which the early evangelists preached the gospel.

Throughout history, people have invented false gods and worshiped that which appealed to their carnal desires. We would assume that this religious culture would also be common among those today who claim to be believers, and yet have little knowledge of the God of the Bible. If one does not believe this, then consider how much fornication (for example, homosexuality) is now accepted in the religious world. The worship of the biblically ignorant, therefore, is filled with misguided immorality that is contrary to the word of God. Unfortunately, those who worship in ignorance have no idea that they are offering ignorant worship.

For example, when we lived in Brazil many years ago, we picked up the local newspaper one day and read the report of how one “Christian” group had taken five or six of the babies of the

**One can worship
God acceptably
only if he knows
God through His
Revelation to man.**

church group, bound them, and in worship drown them in the sea at the beach. As we reel in horror at such an act, we must take a look at our own efforts to worship God.

It is certainly innate within man to worship. But if our worship is not directed by our knowledge of who God is, then we will invent rituals, systems and ceremonies of worship according to how we believe our imagined god is to be worshiped. Those who have had a history of spiritism, voodooism and animistic spirits in their culture will often bring their former beliefs into the context of Christianity. They will thus worship God according to their former religious culture, not according to the directions of the word of God.

From what Jesus said in John 4:23,24, we would assume that any worship that is not based on what God considered to be “the truth” is not acceptable to God. It is for this reason that not all worship is pleasing to God. Simply because one worships, does not mean that his worship is inherently pleasing to the God of the Bible.

It is not that God has prescribed a legal formula for acceptable worship. Worship “in truth” is not following a supposed scriptural form of worship. If God had prescribed expressions or acts of worship that must legally be carried out in order to validate one’s worship, then we would eventually conduct such expressions or acts as a religious ceremony with no worshipful spirit at all. It is unfortunate that once people legalize acts or performances of worship, they then use their acts of worship to make judgments of others who do not act accordingly. They presume that others are not worshipping God according to the “biblical” and legal ceremony of worship.

Worship cannot be legalized, lest worshipers assume that they have worshiped after their performance of legal actions.

This does not mean, however, that we cannot discover in the pages of the word of God expressions of worship that were carried out by faithful people of God. The expressions of worship of many in the Bible was what they offered according to the instructions of God, such as, animal sacrifices. Others simply fell to the ground in worship, offering nothing and performing no acts of worship.

It is interesting to note that when Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for Isaac, the servant worshiped when he perceived that Rebekah presented herself at a well to give him water and water for his camels. All this transpired in fulfillment of a servant's prayer to God (Gn 24:26). In his worship, he offered nothing. It was worship in thanksgiving of what God provided (See 2 Co 4:15). He simply worshiped when he perceived the providential work of God to provide a wife for Isaac. He worshiped in thanksgiving that God answered his prayer to accomplish his mission for his master (Gn 24:12).

When one seeks to be true in heart to God, then he will worship God in response to the truth of the gospel. Being true to God means that one's life is given to God as His servant. We are servants to God, not in word, but in deed and truth (1 Jn 3:17). Through godly living, we thus seek to live as expressions of worship to our God. We are thus inspired as God's sons to live in service to all men (Gl 6:10).

Therefore, it is imperative that God reveal Himself in order that our worship be in response to the truth of the gospel. So it is as Paul wrote that God "*desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of **the truth***" (1 Tm 2:4). If we are to worship God in truth, then we must have a knowledge of this "truth."

It may be surprising to many to know that "the truth" is not a selection of favorite scriptures that legally define some system of worship. "Coming to a knowledge of the truth" is not learning more Bible, but using the Bible to learn more about "the truth." In the Bible we learn "the truth" of the incarnate Son. Jesus explained, "*I am the way, **the truth, and the life***" (Jn 14:6).

"The truth" is not the word of God. For Christians today, it is the medium through which we learn **who** the truth is. It is Jesus who is the truth through whom we seek to know the God who seeks our worship. The Bible is "*the word of the truth of the gospel*" (Cl 1:5). Therefore, if we would come to a knowledge of the truth, then we must understand and obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those who have not obeyed the gospel are destitute of the truth of the gospel (1 Tm 6:5). On the other hand, gospel-obedient people worship in response to the gospel. This is the grace that inspires their worship (2 Co 4:15).

The obvious conclusion to this point is that **all worship of God that does not go through, or not is inspired by the incarnate Son of God as the truth, is false worship.** When Jesus said that He was the way, the truth and the life, He was saying that if anyone seeks to approach the Father, they must go through Him. Jesus continued, “*I am the door. If anyone enters through Me, he will be saved*” (Jn 10:9). “*If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out*” (Jn 15:6). Therefore, Jesus said, “*I have come as Light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness*” (Jn 12:46). Except through Jesus, there is no other door through which we can enter in worship into the heavenly sanctuary of the Father.

Our lives are given in response to the gospel of Jesus. In this way, our lives are given in worship. Romans 12:1 is a key passage that opens a door concerning the worshipful abiding of the Christian in Jesus Christ:

Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

The Greek word *latreuo* that is used in this verse is here translated “service,” as it is also translated in Romans 9:4. The root meaning of the word is simply “service.” In quoting Romans 12:1, some have assumed that all that we do is worship. This view has been assumed from adding statements as 1 Corinthians 10:31: “*Therefore, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*” Paul likewise wrote to the Colossians, “*Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him*” (Cl 3:17). Those statements would include worship, but both focus on a life-style that is in the name of Jesus for the glory of God.

When one recognizes the grace of God, it is only natural to respond with service.

There is a difference between worship and service, though some service may be offered in worship of God. For example, we clean our houses every day. The cleaning of our houses is only our duty, since we

do not want to live in a dirty house. We do not clean our houses in worship to God. However, if we clean our houses, it can be to the glory of God. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:15, “*For*

In thanksgiving to God, we worship through our service to others.

all things are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.” Because of the overwhelming grace of God that we realize in our own lives, we may be moved to clean houses in service to the needs of others.

When we understand the mercy of God, it is only reasonable that we serve Him by serving others. In the true sense of the phrase “worship service,” we have worshiped God in serving one another. The life of the disciple of Jesus is thus full of worship service, though not all the service that one might perform is worship.

A form of the word *latreuo* (*latris*) is used both in reference to service to God and men. A hired servant (*latron*) simply works for men. However, as a servant (*latron*) of God, we have given our lives in service to God (See At 24:14; Hb 12:28). This thought would be complemented by Paul’s statement of Colossians 3:17. This would be the lifetime nature of the reasonable service of Romans 12:1. One gives himself in lifetime service to God, but is not always in a continual mental state of worship throughout his lifetime.

We would question the teaching that worship in truth is a ritualistic system that is defined in Scripture and legalistically performed. If we set out on a theological course to discover in Scripture such a supposed legal system of worship, and are honest with ourselves, then we

Worship is never limited or confined to legal actions.

will find ourselves to be inconsistent and often frustrated. We will find ourselves as a brotherhood divided as each Bible student comes forth with a greater or lesser number of acts or ceremonies of worship. We do not think that God would so frustrate the universal body of Christ.

We do not think that God would leave His people to their own deductive intellects in order to determine a supposedly true system of legal worship. If one’s worship is validated as true by a legal system of

worship performances, then the newborn Christian is at risk until he discovers the correct actions to perform in order that his worship be true. If we can only understand this one point in reference to worship, then we will confess what irrational humbugs we often become when we go to war with other religious groups over those things we propose to be correct performances of worship.

True worship is not validated by the legal performance of a worship system. When Abraham left his three servants, he went with Isaac to a place to worship alone with his son (Gn 22:5). When the child of David died, David washed himself, changed his clothes, and went alone to the house of the Lord and worshiped (2 Sm 12:20). These and many other worshipers in the Bible did not seek to worship by legally performing some ritual in order that their worship be true.

True worship is not validated by meritorious performances.

We must keep in mind that worship is simply vertical, that is, it is directed to God. It is individual, for it is individuals who pour out their hearts vertically to their Creator. When people feel inspired and thankful to God, they worship. When any of God's children seek to live true to their God, they worship in response to the truth of the gospel that was revealed through Jesus. If a saint is alone in a desert, he can worship without any mechanical crutches and without performing any acts of worship.

It is erroneous to assert that true worship is bound to or confined to the physical crutches of one's environment or ritualistic performances. In fact, unless one can strip himself of all the modern performances, electronic gear, and sanctuaries wherein people seek to stimulate themselves and "practice" worship, he will never learn the spirit of spontaneous worship in the solitude of being alone with God. If one seeks to learn to worship again, he should look for a desert. That is where God sent great men as Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist and Paul in order that they connect with Him in worship. If one cannot find a desert, then look for a closet (Mt 6:6). There are no mechanical inventions in deserts and closets. There are no rituals or acts of worship to perform. One is simply alone with God in the solitude of an environment that is void of any distractions.

One cannot worship God in response to the truth of the gospel unless he worships God in spirit, for all that was accomplished through the gospel of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection deal with spiritual matters. As a child seeks to obediently respond to a loving father, so the obedient saint responds in a worshipful spirit to the Father who loved him or her through the giving of His only begotten Son. This is the true essence of one's individual worship of His Creator and guiding Father. In order to discover again the joy of simple worship of God, one must present himself to God in the simplest manner possible. Therefore, find a desert, or place of solitude in order to find God.

Chapter 5 WAYWARD WORSHIP

As our creator, God is the Father of our created spirit that is within every human being (Hb 12:9). It is our natural instinct, therefore, to worship because we have been created after the spiritual image of God. It is for this reason that there are no commands in the Bible to worship. There is no need for a spirit-filled son to be commanded to pay homage to the Creator of his spirit. All commands in the Bible are in reference to Whom we must direct our worship, and how He seeks to be worshiped. The Who and how instructions are in the Bible because mankind has throughout history gone astray in knowledge in reference to the only one true and living God. The spirit of idolatry has prevailed upon the earth from the beginning.

Those who are ignorant of God's word cannot acceptably worship the God of truth.

In the absence of a knowledge of who God is, people will seek out some object or some spirit to worship. God said the following of His people Israel when they were in a state of ignorance of His word:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I will also reject you so that you will be no priest to me. Seeing you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children (Hs 4:6).

It was not that Israel became irreligious. On the contrary, they remained religious, but they forgot the inspired dictionary that explained the God who had delivered them from Egyptian captivity. They subsequently created religious beliefs that would conform to their own desires. And once they had created such religious beliefs after their own desires, it was only natural for them to create gods who would condone their unrighteous behavior. No idolater wants to believe in a god before whom he must eventually give account.

We could say the same of many today who have either forgotten the inspired dictionary (the Bible), or who desire to have no knowledge of His revelation to mankind. Because these modern-day idolaters are worshipful beings, they create worship after their own inventions. Muslims and Hindus do not believe in the God of the Bible. Both Jesus and the New Testament evangelists, as they went forth into all the world, encountered such people in the first century. Our study of these encounters motivates us to look to ourselves and those around us in a religious world in order to determine the true worshipers of God today. In looking around, the only standard we have to judge whether we are idolatrous, is the word of God. Therefore, before we make any judgments concerning the faith of others in reference to the God in which they believe and worship, we must first consider ourselves. There are three contexts in the New Testament that clarify this matter. All three are encounters that Jesus and the early disciples had with religious people as the gospel went forth into all the world.

A. Vain worship:

The word “vain” means useless. When associated with the word “worship” it would refer to worship that is useless in accomplishing the purpose for which God seeks, that is, worship that is pleasing and acceptable to Him. The his-

**Our obedience
to the gospel
of Jesus qualifies
our worship to be
acceptable to Him.**

torical encounter of Jesus with the religious leaders of His day is the only context in which Jesus used the phrase “vain worship.” The record of this encounter is found in both Matthew (15:1-9) and Mark (7:1-9).

The following points that these two inspired recorders made in reference to Jesus' pronouncement of vain worship is both revealing and definitive:

1. Binding where God has not bound: In the context of this encounter of Jesus with the Jewish religious leaders, the Pharisees and scribes observed that the disciples of Jesus did not ceremonially wash their hands when they came from the market place (Mk 7:1-5). The accusation of the religious leaders involved a good practice, but it was simply a religious tradition of the Jewish fathers. **They had religiously bound something on the people that God had not bound.** Their tradition had thus become a religious law, and the opportunity by which they would judge others if this religious rite was not observed.

Jesus' declaration that vain worship involves establishing traditional acts of behavior that have no authority in the word of God, is our first warning concerning our own worship. If we bind on ourselves those things in worship that are of our own invention, then we might find ourselves worshiping God in vain. If we find ourselves arguing with ourselves concerning the performance of any religious ceremony that is not found in the Bible, then we have involved ourselves in the same disputing that the Pharisees and scribes sought to have with Jesus.

2. Hypocritical behavior: The occasion of the rebuke of the disciples by the religious leaders presented the opportunity for Jesus to exhort these leaders concerning their behavior and religious traditions, specifically their vain worship. Though the washing of hands, pots and pans would not be considered "worship," either by Jesus or by the religious leaders, the practice of binding where God had not bound in their religious behavior spilled over into their hearts, and thus, their hearts could not offer true worship to God.

The religious leaders could not worship in truth because they were more concerned with their religious life-style of traditions than keeping the commandments of God. Jesus thus referred to them as hypocrites, which reference was both in reference to their behavior and to their worship (Mk 7:6). It is in this context that Jesus quoted Isaiah, whose initial message was directed to the idolatrous nation of Israel

that had turned from God: “*This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me*” (Mk 7:6; see Is 29:13).

We could paraphrase Isaiah’s statement by God to read, “These people make pronouncements of praise with their mouths, but they live contrary to My will.” If one is not true to God through an obedient life-style, then certainly he cannot worship God in truth. Today, **those who refuse to obey the gospel, therefore, worship God in vain. This is true because the appreciative demeanor of one’s heart in response to the gospel validates his or her worship before God.**

True worship is validated by gospel obedience.

If one does not respond to the gospel of the incarnate Son of God, then certainly his or her worship is in vain in reference to the One who sent His Son into the world. **No matter how zealous and exhausting one’s worship may be, if he or she has not responded to the gospel by being buried in baptism with the incarnate Son of God on the cross, then all such worship is useless in the eyes of God** (See Rm 6:3-6). This is not a judgment, but an obvious conclusion to the response that the gospel of Jesus should have on the hearts of people. If the gospel does not generate an obedient response in one’s heart to the grace of God, then one cannot acceptably worship the One who revealed the gospel.

3. Lip worship: We can understand Jesus’ rebuke of the Pharisees and scribes’ “lip worship” in Mark 7:6 by His statement in verse 7. He was connecting their life-style to their worship. “Lip worship” was simply going through the acts of worship, but the worship was purely outward, for their religiosity was based on the doctrines and commandments of men. Their worship, therefore, did not come forth from an obedient heart that sought to pay homage to God. The religious leaders, in their religious behavior, manifested an outward legal worship of self-righteousness that was void of an inner commitment to the commandments of God. Their hearts were far from God simply because they had exalted their religious traditions above the commandments of God. In fact, they rejected the commandments of God in order to obey their religious traditions, and thus establish a foundation for their own self-righteousness.

We are Bible students lest we fall under this same condemnation. We seek to know the God we worship. We can become zealously religious people, but our zeal in religiosity can never validate our worship. We can participate in euphoric worship assemblies, but all such assemblies are vain unless we know and obey the gospel. If such euphoric assemblies did validate ourselves before God, then the zeal of every religious person in the world would be validated in their own ignorance of the One who sent His Son into this world. It is for this reason that God “*desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth* [of the gospel]” (1 Tm 2:4). Unfortunately, there are those who are “*always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (2 Tm 3:7). There are too many people who “*have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge*” (Rm 10:2). In view of this fact in the religious world today, Paul wrote the following:

For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God (Rm 10:3).

4. Vain worship: Because the hearts of the Pharisees and scribes were far from reverence of the will of God, their worship was centered around the traditions of men. Though they performed what appeared to be worship of God, God considered their worship performances to be worthless. We would caution ourselves, therefore, when we approach God in worship, focusing on our zealous worship, but not on the knowledge of His righteousness.

The worshiper must determine if his or her worship is according to what pleases God, or what pleases one’s own self. If one seeks to live according to the commandments of God, then his or her worship is not in vain. In the religious world today there are untold numbers of worshipers who advertise their worship as pleasing to God. But if their worship is based on a religiosity that is after the doctrines and commandments of men, then Jesus pronounces their worship to be vain.

5. Laying aside the commandment of God: Herein is revealed the cause of vain worship. We have found that many in the religious

world today who worship God care little for the word of God. And because millions of worshipers care little for the word of God, they are defensive about their worship. On the other hand, true worshipers are very cautious of the fact that their worship pours forth from a gospel-obedient heart.

In the context of the religious leaders whom Jesus encountered, too many religionists care little for the word of God. They are more concerned about maintaining their religious traditions than in honoring God through a response to the gospel. Jesus' conclusion and application to their worship is obvious. If one has little concern for the commandments of God, then certainly he or she cannot worship God in response to the truth of the gospel. On the contrary, he will lay aside the word of God and carry on worshiping according to his worship traditions.

Those who willingly disregard any response to the gospel of Jesus in their behavior are worshiping God in vain. Jesus concluded, "*All too well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your own tradition*" (Mk 7:9). This statement by Jesus is what identified their worship as useless. It is very difficult for some to worship God, while they carry on with life-styles that are contrary to the will of God. They have constructed a religious behavior after their own heritage, and thus, their search for the will of God is little, if not at the point of rejecting the commandments of God. Their worship tradition after the doctrines and commandments of men is often too strong to ignore in order to discover worship of God in spirit and the truth of the gospel. A religious heritage that is not based on the word of God will not lead one to worship God in truth. A euphoric concert assembly in worship is in vain if those who participate in the assembly have not responded in baptism to the gospel of the incarnate Son of God.

**Religious heritage
cannot validate
our worship.**

It is necessary to interject here in the context of Jesus' judgment of the Jewish religious leaders. The theology of the Pharisees and scribes concerning self-justification spilled over into their worship. In this case, their self-justification through the religious tradition of washing

pots, pans and hands as a religious act of self-justification made their worship vain. Jesus' response to this self-righteous behavior of self-justification in their lives by legally obeying their own religious rites and rituals reflected on their hearts, and thus, their worship of God was not acceptable to God. They came before the Lord with a heart of self-praise because of what they were doing in their lives, not with a contrite heart of appreciation for the grace of God.

If one seeks to establish his or her own system of righteousness wherein one seeks to justify himself through his meritorious works, then he becomes as the Pharisee who prayed, "*God, I thank You that I am not as other men: extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I possess*" (Lk 18:11). Self-justification through fasting and tithes will not prepare one's heart for worship simply because worship must be generated out of a heart of humility, not arrogance. And herein was the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and scribes who brought judgment upon the disciples for not self-justifying themselves through the washing of pots, pans and hands.

B. Self-made worship:

There is a connection between the vain worship about which Jesus spoke in Mark 7:1-9 and the self-made worship about which Paul wrote in Colossians 2:20-23. The connection is that when religious people willingly reject the will of God, they will invent for themselves a worship that is after their own desires. Paul wrote,

*Therefore, if you died with Christ [in obedience to the gospel] from the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourselves to [religious] ordinances? **Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle.**" All these concern things that perish with the using, **after the commandments and doctrines of men.** These things have indeed a **show of wisdom in self-made religion** and self-abasement and neglect of the body, but not in any value in restraining the indulgence of the flesh.*

As the religious leaders in the context of Mark 7:1-9, even the Gentiles had legally imposed on themselves religious rites, which rites and rituals were in their religious behavior. Paul's immediate answer to such legal religiosity was not to touch, taste or handle. In other words, when religion digresses to legal obedience of religious rites, rituals and ceremonies, the Holy Spirit, through Paul, said that we must not go there. Such things profit nothing in reference to salvation simply because they pass away with those who invented them.

Entertainment originates from outside. Worship originates from inside.

In the context of Colossians 2:20-23, Paul did make a statement that should shock all religionists today who would defend the legal religiosity about which he spoke. He stated, "*These things have indeed a show of wisdom.*" We are reminded of the countless assemblies in Christendom wherein there is an entertaining "show" going on to excite the audience. The band is playing and the stars are performing. Everything presents a show of religiosity and worship, but the show will terminate with the passing of the performers.

True worship can never be a show, for shows are external. They are performed externally in order to excite an audience. Once the show is over, the audience goes home with only the expectation that there will be another show next Sunday morning.

True worshipers never involve themselves in theatrical performances that appeal to the lusts of the ears and eyes. In theatrical worship, the actors perform in order to excite the audience, but the audience is not participating in the show itself. The show makes them an audience. The supposed wisdom of the self-made religious performances may appeal to the senses of the audience, but we must not confuse such with worship. This is the deceptive nature of religious theatrics that are performed by a select few for the entertainment of an audience. It is not wrong to be entertained, but we must always keep in mind that entertainment is about us. We cannot entertain God with our worship performances. Worship is totally about God. In true worship, therefore, only God is the audience.

Entertainment flows into our senses. Worship flows out from our hearts.

Self-made religion is a show for man, not God. As Paul inferred, such worship is of this world. Some translations use the term “self-imposed” worship in the Colossians 2:23 passage. “Show religion” is religious behavior that the performers impose on themselves in order to demonstrate their religiosity before others. Such is vain worship, for it is man-invented and man-performed. It is external. It is not wrong to be entertained in a religious context with spiritual singing. However, we must understand that a performance for entertainment is not worship for the audience. Too often the performers in the show are seeking the “worship” of the audience. We might assume that God is being worshiped while we are being entertained, but in entertainment our minds are too often focused on the entertainers, not on God.

**In worship
only God can
be the audience.**

Though the context of Colossians 2:20-23 is not specifically in reference to religious entertainment, we would caution ourselves about becoming involved in religious behavior that hypocritically gives the impression that we are worshipping God, when actually we are “touching,” “tasting” and “handling” a self-made religion that pleases ourselves. We must keep in mind what Paul said, that entertaining performers may put on a good show, but it is according to the commandments and doctrines of men. Once the performers are gone, the show is over.

True worship of God is never over when the performers fade away behind the curtain of death. They only continue their worship in the presence of God.

The twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever. And they cast their crowns before the throne, saying, “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and because of Your will they were created and have their existence” (Rv 4:10,11).

There is no show business in heaven.

One might ask if it is wrong to motivate an audience with teaching through spiritual songs. In view of the mandate of Paul in Ephesians

5:19 and Colossians 3:16, the answer would be that teaching through song is a medium through which the people of God edify one another. Paul instructed that teaching be accomplished through song. Singing to one another does not always mean that everyone assembled is to sing at the same time. There are those who have been blessed with beautiful voices who can minister exhortation and encouragement through song.

If we discourage the vocally gifted not to minister in song, then we would be denying them the right to use their God-given gift to minister to others by teaching in song. As a preacher with the gift to speak has the right to use his gift to minister through vocal teaching, so the gift singer has the right to use his or her vocal gift to minister in teaching through song. As the preacher is not entertaining through his teaching, so the singer is not entertaining through his or her teaching by song.

C. Ignorant worship:

The worshipers that Paul encountered in Athens were not like the religious leaders Jesus encountered during His ministry. The Jewish religious leaders had received the oracles of God (Rm 3:2). They had a history of God working among them. However, they rejected the commandments of God in order to keep their traditions, and by doing such, they brought vain worship before God.

The Bible reveals the one true and living God who is to be worship by all men.

Those whom Paul addressed in the Colossians 2 context were seeking to manifest their religiosity by that which gave a presentation of worship, but actually, it was also self-imposed religious behavior after the religious inventions of men. Now in the context of Acts 17, Paul encountered those who had no revelation from God concerning who He was or how He was to be worshiped. They were thus worshipping unknown gods they had created after their own imagination. And because they were worshipping the creation of their imaginations, they had imposed on themselves self-made worship.

Paul stood up on the Areopagus in Athens and proclaimed to all

these Greek idolaters,

Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious. For as I passed by and observed your objects of worship, I found an altar with this inscription, 'TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore, the One whom you worship in ignorance, Him I declare to you (At 17:22,23).

The Greek Athenians had crafted many idols with their hands that portrayed the gods they had created in their minds. However, they were wise enough to understand that if the gods they created after their own thinking behaved according to their thinking, then their created gods were actually no greater than their thinking. They concluded, therefore, that there must be a God beyond the imagination of men. In coming to this conclusion, they fashioned an idol to “The Unknown God” just in case they offended Him if they did not offer Him worship. This “unknown God” was the true and living God they could not create in their imagination, but the God of which they were ignorant. Their worship of this God, therefore, was in ignorance, for they had no revelation from Him.

One cannot worship God correctly if he does not know God.

The Athenians were knowledgeable philosophers who reasoned that there must be a true God of the universe. They concluded what Paul assumed all men should conclude from those things that have been created.

For the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and divinity, so that they are without excuse (Rm 1:20).

From the wonder of the natural world, Paul stated that one should conclude that there is a Creator. A design presupposes a Designer. Since something cannot come from nothing, then Something has always existed. The honest worshiper, therefore, would seek for revelation from the Designer, the Something that brought all things into existence. Worshipful men, therefore, who are honest in their worship of the “Un-

known God,” will seek revelation from this God. Paul revealed this God to the Athenians. Through the revelation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, this same God is revealed today. Those who are ignorant of the gospel will continue in their ignorant worship. However, it is incumbent upon all people of faith that they should grope after the one true and living God in their worship. Paul exhorted the Athenians,

And He has made of one man all nations of men to dwell on the face of the earth ... so that they should seek the Lord, if perhaps they might grope after Him and find Him, though He is not far from every one of us (At 17:26,27).

From the statements that were made by Scripture in reference to vain, self-made and ignorant worship, we would conclude that none of these are acceptable to God. It is necessary, therefore, that all men seek out the word of God and read concerning how God would be worshiped in spirit and truth. Those who are held in bondage to their own self-made religiosity might not begin this search. Those who are satisfied with the gods they have created in order to appease their own self-imposed religiosity will likewise not search the word of God for correction and guidance in matters of worship. Few who are satisfied with their own self-imposed religiosity will search for both the God of the Bible, and how God would have all men come to Him in worship through spirit and the truth of the gospel of His Son. Nevertheless, in view of the fact that God judges some worship to be vain and self-made, sincere believers should make every effort to discover worship that is acceptable to God. This worship is discovered only in the revelation of the God who seeks our worship.

**One's worship
is not controlled
or determined
by others.**

Chapter 6 WALKING WITH TRUE WORSHIPERS

We live in a religious world where people of faith have invented

every sort of religious behavior, from which springs every imaginable expression of worship. In the worship of non-Christian religions, worship is centered around self-imposed meritorious religious ceremonies by which people seek to justify themselves before their gods. In reference to Christendom, countless worshipers have likewise burdened themselves with a host of meritorious religious rituals and ceremonies that have either hindered, or led them astray into a religious world of self-justification. So we wonder what Jesus would think if He were to step into the assemblies of some of the “worship” assemblies today.

We have allowed our minds and behavior in worship to be influenced by our own inventions and desires. For this reason, that which we would call worship is often a state of mind wherein we are actually aloof, shallow, indifferent, cold, distracted, and in some cases, simply narcissistic. “Worship” is more often about what we want, our feelings, our emotions, our performances. We seek entertainment that we pass off as worship. We have thus invented in modern times a gimmick worship that is focused on either elaborate sanctuaries, organized ceremonies, theatrical performances, or everything combined in a theatrical production that generates the emotional frenzy of a modern rock concert.

We have been in assemblies where people were emotionally overcome, and subsequently lost all control over themselves. We have witnessed those who have rolled in the dirt, cried out uncontrollably, and in some cases, fell into a state of subconsciousness where they were totally unaware of reality. We have experienced vocal puppeteers who pull on the emotional strings of the weak in order to lead them into emotional hysteria in the name of Jesus. We do not view such as worship, but the occult result of those who have lost all reason in reference to sobriety and self-control. Such assemblies have brought shame on the name of Christ by the unbelieving world who often view Christianity as assembled madness.

In this chapter we thought it would be good to go back in history in order to rediscover those who maintained their senses in their worship of God. In order to do this, we must follow those heroes of faith who poured out their inner souls in worship of God. In taking this walk

back in time to faithful worshipers, we can examine ourselves in order to make our own judgments concerning our homage to the God of heaven. We can do as Paul urged the Corinthians: “*Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test your own selves*” (2 Co 13:5).

Since we live in a time of religious history that seems to identify theatrical performances and uncontrolled neurotic episodes as worship, it would be good to allow the Holy Spirit through the pages of inspired words to define for us again the nature, essence, character and behavior of the worshipful believer. Only in this way can we understand the worship that is acceptable to God. We would, therefore, take you on this adventure, pointing out along the way some of the characteristics of true worship. In doing so, we must make some candid contrasts between the theatrical performances and emotionally charged occult assemblies of today in the religious world that are substituted for the true worship we see in the Bible. Our purpose in walking with worshipers through the word of God is to be restore to the simplicity of worship in our efforts to approach our Father with worship that is in spirit and in response to the truth of the gospel.

A. Abraham worshiped:

It is recorded in Genesis 22 where God tested Abraham (Gn 22:1). He asked Abraham to take his only son and offer him as a burnt offering (Gn 22:2). There is no break in the context between the command of verse 1 and the action of Abraham in verse 2. After the command to offer his son, Abraham slept throughout the night. He then arose early the next morning in order to make his way to Moriah, the place where God designated that he offer Isaac. After three days’ journey, Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place that God had designated for the offering. In verse 5 it is recorded, “*And Abraham said to his young men, ‘Stay here with the donkey. **I and the lad will go there and worship. And we will come again to you.**’*”

One can go to any place for worship, but worship is not confined to any place.

They were in the wilderness and far from people. Abraham even asked the two young men who accompanied them to remain where they were, while he and Isaac went a short distance further in order to worship alone. Abraham said to them that he and the lad “*will go there and worship.*” We should note that there was no fanfare stirred on the occasion. There was no assembly, no audience, and certainly no performers. Their worship was to be in the quietness of a secluded place. Their worship was to be offered only by the two in the solitude of the wilderness. They would retain their senses in worship, and return again to the servants.

This was a worship of faith on the part of Abraham, for he told the young men, “*we will come again.*” Abraham indeed would carry through with the command to offer Isaac, for the angel had to stay his hand as he was about to thrust the knife into Isaac. However, the Hebrew Scriptures that the Jews possessed for centuries did not reveal what Abraham believed in reference to resurrection. He believed that if he did administer death to his only son, Isaac, God would raise him from the dead. This belief of Abraham in the resurrection was discovered by the Jews over two thousand years later when the Holy Spirit revealed his faith in the book of Hebrews (See Hb 11:17-19).

Worship can be expressed in solitude and silence.

In Abraham’s worship on the occasion on Moriah, he was giving up something that he dearly loved. He did not come before the Lord empty handed. He would worship by giving up his only son. Isaac was worshiping by giving up his own life. **The purpose behind the command that Abraham offer his only son was that he, and the nation that would come from his loins, should never forget that a Father would indeed in the future give up His only begotten Son.** Though there would be ten thousand angels who stood by and could have stopped the death of the Son of God on the cross, they remained at attention by the command of the Father while the Son of God willingly died that all men might live. This is a gospel matter that should stir worship in our hearts.

B. Abraham's servant worshiped:

On another occasion, Abraham instructed his eldest servant in Genesis 24 to go to the house of his fathers in order to find a wife for Isaac, his son (Gn 24:4). In obedience to his master, the servant took ten camels for all the supplies that he needed for the journey, as well as gifts to give to the one from whom the future wife of Isaac would come (Gn 24:10).

When the servant came to Mesopotamia and to the city of Nahor, he kneeled down by a well of water outside the city. He then bowed down in prayer and asked God to lead him to the woman who would be Isaac's wife. He prayed to God that the damsel from whom he would ask water would be the one for whom he had journeyed. Even at the time he was making the prayer, God was in the process of answering his request, for Rebekah was already on her way to the well (Gn 24:15).

The events that immediately transpired resulted in the fulfillment of all that the servant had asked, and the subsequent accomplishment of his mission from Abraham. Rebekah offered him water and asked to water his camels. When asked concerning who she was, she responded that she was of the house of Nahor. Nahor was from the descendants of Abraham's ancestors.

When Abraham's servant perceived all that happened in response to his mission and prayer, he was overcome, understanding that he was personally experiencing the work of God. ***"Then the man bowed down his head and worshiped the Lord"*** (Gn 24:26). His worship was in thanksgiving to God for making his journey successful. His worship was individual and in the presence of Rebekah who certainly did not understand what was happening. His worship came from within his heart when he perceived the providence of God in his life. His worship was personal and directly focused on God. All that we are told concerning his actions was that he bowed down his head. No ceremonies were performed. No assembly was called. He remained in control of his person. His worship was individual and spontaneous. It was a solemn occasion. In all that transpired, he recognized the provi-

Worship results from recognizing the work of God.

dential work of God. Those who worship in spirit need only to perceive the work of God in their lives.

C. Israel worshiped:

Before the Exodus of Israel from Egyptian captivity, Moses asked Aaron to gather together the elders of Israel (Ex 4:29). Once they were gathered, Aaron told the elders all the words that the Lord had spoken to Moses concerning the deliverance of the nation of Israel. In order to confirm the words, Aaron did signs in the presence of the elders.

And when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel, and that He had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped (Ex 4:31; see Ex 12:27).

When the people heard the word of God and perceived that He was working on their behalf, they were moved to worship. When Moses and the elders of Israel were in the presence of God at Mount Sinai, they were to worship (Ex 24:1). When they saw the pillar of cloud at the door of the tabernacle, “*all the people rose up and worshiped*” (Ex 33:10). When people understand that God is working in their lives, they worship in thanksgiving of God’s work. It is for this reason that the grace of the gospel causes worshipful thanksgiving in our hearts (2 Co 4:15). Worship results from those who are in awe of God’s presence in their lives. Worship results from the teaching of the gospel of God’s grace. The act of teaching is not worship on the part of the audience, though the teacher may be worshiping in service of God. The audience would be listening. The teaching of that which the word reveals is what inspires the audience to worship.

D. Joshua worshiped:

In Joshua 5 it is recorded that when Joshua was near Jericho he encountered the captain (angel) of the Lord’s army. When the captain revealed who he was, “*Joshua fell on his face to the earth and wor-*

shipped” (Ja 5:14). His worship was instantaneous when he recognized that he was in the presence of an angel who represented the Lord. His worship was individual. It did not depend on the presence of others. His worship was not expressed through any rituals or directed by anyone in his presence.

In those times when the saints are barred from assemblies, whether in times of war or pandemics, we must remember these things. As we stated before, there is no context of worship in Scripture where worship is inherently tied to or validated by assemblies. All the heroes of faith in the Old Testament often worshiped alone. Their worship often resulted from something that spontaneously happened in their lives. And since there was no such thing as weekly assemblies, the Israelites worshiped on their farms throughout Palestine.

E. Gideon worshiped:

In Judges 7 Gideon was instructed by the Lord to put together a small band of brave Israelites in order to deliver Israel from the oppression of the Midianites. Gideon was doubtful of his commission, though the Lord gave a specific sign that He was with him. In order to be reassured of his commission, Gideon took one of his brave young men and ventured secretly at night into the camp of the Midianites.

While listening secretly outside the tent of a Midianite who had a dream, Gideon secretly listened to another Midianite explain the meaning of the dream of his fellow soldier. The dream was that God would deliver the Midianites into the hands of the Israelites. *“And so it was that Gideon worshiped when he heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation”* (Jg 7:15). So there Gideon was, in the camp of the enemy, in the middle of the night, quietly with his fellow companion, and he worshiped. His worship was immediate, individual, quiet, and in a hostile environment. There was no fanfare, no assembly, no audience, and certainly no noise.

Worship is not determined by one’s environment.

F. The Magi worshiped:

At the time of Jesus' birth, wise men came from the East to Jerusalem (Mt 2:1). They had come from where they lived in order to worship the One they believed was the fulfillment of prophecy (Mt 2:2). *"Now when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother. And they fell down and worshiped Him"* (Mt 2:11). Their worship was in a house, solemn and poured out because they believed that the newly born babe was the promised Messiah. Again, there was no fanfare, calling for others, or generation of emotional hysteria. Their worship came forth from their hearts in the solitude of the newborn of Son of God.

Fulfilled prophecy inspired worship.

G. A leper worshiped:

On one occasion during His ministry, Jesus came down from a mountain to a great multitude of people. In the midst of the great multitude, a leper came forth and worshiped Him (Mt 8:1,2; see Mt 9:18; Lk 8:49). Though surrounded by so many people, one individual was able to worship alone in the presence of a multitude of people. He was able to focus exclusively on Jesus in the presence of so many distractions. His worship was not generated by those who were around him, but in spite of their presence. One can worship regardless of those who are around the worshiper. Worship does not depend on the assembly of people. Worship is always individual, regardless of being in the presence of others.

Worship does not depend on the presence of other worshippers.

H. A ruler worshiped:

On another occasion during Jesus' ministry, Jesus was in the process of teaching (Mt 9:18). While he was teaching *"a certain ruler came and worshiped Him"* (Mt 9:18). The worship was the result of the ruler's belief that Jesus could heal his daughter. The ruler wor-

shipped in the midst of a multitude who were only listening to the teaching of Jesus. They were not in an “act” of worship as listeners to what Jesus said. Jesus was not worshiping in teaching. But here is this father who came and worshiped in their midst regardless of Jesus’ ministry of teaching or the presence of others.

Individuals can worship among multitudes of people.

I. The disciples worshiped:

In Mark 6 it is recorded that Jesus walked on water (Mk 6:48). When the disciples beheld the marvelous event, they were terrified and cried out. Jesus reassured them, “*Be of good cheer. It is I. Do not be afraid*” (Mk 6:50). They were in the middle of the night and in the middle of a storm at sea. It was indeed a terrifying experience. Matthew recorded that Peter said to Jesus, “*Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water*” (Mt 14:28). And so Jesus commanded him. Peter was empowered by Jesus, and thus, he also walked on the water.

Unfortunately, Peter eventually stumbled in his faith as he neared Jesus. Nevertheless, Jesus reached forth and grabbed his hand as Peter was going down. They both then walked to and entered the boat with the other disciples. The storm was then calmed by Jesus. There was dead silence all around them. They were overcome by the surreal moment. “*Then those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, ‘Truly, You are the Son of God’*” (Mt 14:33).

Jesus had brought total quietness to the sea. The disciples were alone with Jesus in the quietness of the moment. Because of what they had just experienced, and realizing that they were in the presence of the Son of God who could control the storm, they were inwardly overcome with awe. They were inwardly driven to worship. There was no hysteria, no crying out in remorse or anxiety. We can only imagine the awesomeness they had in their minds concerning Jesus as they quietly bowed themselves to the floor of the boat to the One who had power over the winds and the seas.

Jesus was deserving of worship because He was the Creator of all things.

J. Reverent believers worshiped:

On one occasion immediately after His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples. “*And they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him*” (Mt 28:9). At the ascension, Jesus was carried up into heaven in the presence of the disciples, “*and they worshiped Him*” (Lk 24:52). When Israel saw fire come down from heaven at the time Solomon dedicated the temple, “*they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshiped*” (2 Ch 7:3). When God reassured Jehoshaphat and the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem that their enemies would not overpower them, they worshiped.

And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground. And all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the Lord, worshipping the Lord (2 Ch 20:18; see 2 Ch 29:29).

From the preceding, and many other occasions where people worshiped God, there are several things that seem to define worship. Worship is personal and individual. Worship can take place

**True worshipers
are always
in control of their
mental facilities.**

on any occasion and at any time. Worship is certainly not identified by ceremonies and performances. The worshipers simply fell to their knees, or prostrate on the ground when they realized that they were in the presence of Deity (Ps 95:6). When people perceived the providence of

**Our perception
of the awesomeness
of God explodes in
worship.**

God, they worshiped. When people heard the message of the word of God, they worshiped (Ne 9:3). When people experienced the work of God in their lives, they worshiped. Worship came from those who had thankful hearts. Wor-

ship was not planned or programmed around any events or confined to any specific locations. Worship was not defined by any performance of actions or ceremonies.

Chapter 7

WORSHIP ANYWHERE AND ANYTIME

As we have stated before, one of the most profound teachings of Jesus on worship during His earthly ministry is found in John 4 where He encountered the Samaritan woman. At one point during the conversion, the woman perceived that Jesus was a prophet (Jn 4:19). In order to shift the conversion from her difficult relationship with other men, the woman brought up the subject of locations of worship.

The woman was a Samaritan, which was a mixed race of people who were not true Jews, nor did they worship according to the restrictions of the Jews' religious traditions. As with the Jews, the Samaritan woman referred Jesus to the sacred place of their worship, which was "*this mountain*" (Jn 4:20). She also pointed out that the sacred place of worship for the Jews was Jerusalem. But Jesus changed the conversion to reveal what had always been true in reference to places of worship.

Worship is not about places, but about people. It is not about where, but anywhere. And in reference to the established feast days of the Israelites when they brought their offerings to the tabernacle, and then later to the temple, worship was not about events and ceremonies, but about pouring out one's homage to God at anytime and anywhere. The Jews came into Palestine as farmers, and thus their individual worship of God for blessing them with the land was worship on their farms and in their homes. There was no such thing as a weekly assembly culture for worship written in the Sinai law.

Worship is about people and God, not places and performances.

"*Woman, believe Me,*" Jesus responded to the woman, "*the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem worship the Father*" (Jn 4:21). In their fall from the authority of the word of God throughout their history, the Israelites, after the manner of the idolatrous nations around them, sought out and designated high places to which they would go and worship (Jr 7:31). They desired to be in a particular place and environment in order to worship their imag-

ined gods. Being built on a hill, the temple also became a place of worship, which place was never in the plan of God. The temple was a concession of God to David, for God knew that Israel as a whole would eventually be divided, with the northern ten tribes going into Assyrian captivity in 722/21 B.C. God knew that the southern two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, with a remnant that came out of the northern tribes after the Assyrian captivity, would gather around the temple of Solomon as a place to which they would take their sacrifices. But the temple was never in the Sinai law, for the Israelites were to move the tabernacle continually among the tribal areas of Palestine.

The universal nature of the church necessitates universal worship.

The Samaritans, on the other hand, who resided in the territory of the former northern kingdom of Israel, established their primary location of worship in Samaria (Jn 4:20). But in the context of John 4, Jesus revealed that the time had come when worship would not be confined to specific places. Worship had never been so confined, and the hour of restoration of true worship was coming when God's people, whether Samaritans, Jews or Gentiles, would not worship God in the confinement of a physical location. **True worship would exist throughout the world in the hearts of those who would come to the Father in spirit and truth.**

An assembly does not mandate the presence of God. God was with the people before the assembly.

The fact that the gospel would go into all the world necessitated that the worship of Christians never be confined to any specific location. One lone individual in the jungle of Africa can worship God acceptably. One can worship in the wilderness as Abraham. One can worship in the camp of the enemy as Gideon. One can worship in the midst of multitudes of people as the leper. Location has nothing to do with inspiring or conducting worship.

We are in the habit of going to places in order to worship. We build buildings in which to worship. We even go up to mountain tops to worship. It is not wrong to go to Jerusalem to worship, for such did the Ethiopian eunuch (At 8:27). But he was only doing that which he

knew at the time. We wonder where “he went to worship” when he returned to Ethiopia.

Neither a particular place, hour, nor environment can either confine or define our worship. We are worshipful beings before we show up at the “hour of worship.” We show up at a particular place because we are worshipful people. If we were not worshipful people, then we would never show up. But we must keep in mind that places and sanctuaries do not define the worship of those who worship in spirit and truth. And thus, our worship is not confined to places of worship, ceremonies or acts of worship, or the “hour of worship.” All such things may result from our worship, but they do not define or confine our worship, for God’s people worship in spirit and in truth at anytime and anywhere.

The church is the people of God who are in worship before they arrive at a place of worship.

We need to conclude by referring to a passage that is almost consistently used out of context in reference to the presence of God in our lives and our worship of Him. It is a passage that has nothing to do with worship, but is almost always used in reference to worship. Jesus said, “*For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in the midst of them*” (Mt 18:20).

This **is not** a statement that is used in reference to worship. It is in the context of judgment actions that are taken in reference to the one who refuses to hear the church concerning sin in which he is involved (Mt 18:17). If the passage were speaking of assembly and worship, then the poor brother who is alone in the middle of a desert or jungle does not have the promise that the Lord is with him in his worship. But such could not be further from the truth of God’s presence or our worship. Our presence with two or three other people does not validate our worship, neither does it guarantee God’s presence. Our being alone in worship does not restrict God’s presence with us as we worship by ourselves in the solitude of our own closet.

God is where we are. He hears. He accepts our worship wherever we are in the world and whenever we pour out our hearts to Him in worship. God’s presence in our lives is not determined by the assem-

bly of two or three who have gathered together. He is always present wherever we are. David concluded, “*Where will I go from Your spirit? Or where will I flee from Your presence?*” (Ps 139:7). The answer is nowhere! Worship is simply not dependent on assemblies.

We must conclude that true worship is free from physical and emotional addictions. By this we mean that one’s worship must not be dependent on anything outside the heart of man. We live in a world of religiosity where people in their religious behavior are addicted to many “worship stimuli.” Some cannot worship unless they are in a particular place where there is an atmosphere of “spirituality.” Some cannot worship unless they are stimulated by others, or the environment in which they are when they worship. Others must have incense or a crowd of fellow worshipers to spur them on to an attitude of worship. If one cannot worship as Abraham in a quiet place in the wilderness without a physical or emotional stimulus, then one should question his relationship with his Creator. One of the blessings during times when assemblies are either banned or impossible is that each individual Christian has the opportunity to learn how to worship in his or her own solitude.

A spiritual relationship with God is realizing who God is, what He has done for us through the gospel, and what He will do for us in the future when His Son comes again. One need not be addicted to influences outside one’s own heart in order to be inspired to worship God. Though one may be inspired to worship because of his surroundings, this does not mean that we must have special surroundings in order to worship. Surroundings of the created world will stimulate worship, but we worship regardless of our surroundings or what comes to our ears. We are beings of worship. We cannot help but worship the God of the universe.

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ABBREVIATIONS

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**