

Basic Christian Faith and Practice 11: Worshipping God Wholeheartedly

Introduction

Worship of God is what we were made for and what our destiny is to be. What will you be doing for eternity? Not evangelism, not Bible study, but worship. As John Piper has said. “Evangelism exists because worship doesn’t.” That is, in evangelism we seek to bring people who don’t worship the Lord to become worshipers. Worship is even more fundamental than evangelism. It is in a sense what the whole Christian life is all about. And so it is something that we want to understand and devote ourselves to with all our hearts.

I. God Seeks Worshipers Jn 4:19-24

- Context: Jesus talking with a Samaritan woman. The Samaritans believed in the same God as the Jews but differed on some significant theological issues and were not considered Jewish
 - vv. 19-20 - A theological question. This was a legitimate issue between the Jews and Samaritans. Samaritans believed that the place of worship was Mt. Gerazim in Samaria, as opposed to the Jews who held it to be in Jerusalem.
 - vs. 21 - A more fundamental truth. Jesus Christ cuts through religious discussion to concern for really knowing God.
 - vs. 22 - the Jews were right. Jesus did affirm that the Jews were the bearers of the true revelation of God.
 - vv. 23-24 - there are right ways and wrong ways to worship God. God determines how he is to be approached, not us. God does want to be approached; in fact, he wants to enjoy intimacy with us that goes well beyond religious observance, and he has made the way for that approach to happen.
- A. God is to be worshipped *in spirit*. What does that mean? → Not merely outward forms but person to person; by one who is born of the Spirit (born again); by the Spirit’s power and leading.
- B. God is to be worshipped *in truth*. What does that mean? → honesty, integrity, according to his ways, reality, etc.
- Does anything strike you as unusual or especially interesting about v. 23?
- C. God is the seeker.
- Have you ever considered God in this role – actively seeking for worshippers?
 - What difference does this point make? → God does what is necessary for us to be able to worship him. He desires our worship. It is important to him. Worshipping the Lord is tremendously important.

II. God Makes the Way

[In this section we want to contrast the difference between OT worship and worship since Christ. The one is full of fear and distance, whereas, through Jesus, the way is opened to truly encounter God more fully and intimately.]

A. The Mountain of Fear

1. Exodus 19:1-6 – a kingdom of priests, to serve and worship the Lord. It has always been God’s goal to have a people where everyone has equal access to Him.

2. Exodus 19:10-22 – Why could the people not approach God? → See (a.) immediately below.

a. God is holy, and we are sinful! The danger of sin. They could not see the Lord.

- What do you think it was like to worship the Lord in OT times?

b. It was great to worship the Lord in the OT but missing something. Worship in the OT reminded the people of their sinfulness. It was glorious, but restricted, partial, and tinged with fear.

B. The Holy of Holies & the Veil

1. Exodus 26:31-34

- What is the purpose of the veil?

a. The Tabernacle was in their midst (reminding them that God was in their midst) yet its structure spoke of their separation from his holy presence.

b. There were a number of courts with finally the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies in the center of the Tent. In the Holy of Holies the ark of the Covenant rested. It looked like a chest with two angelic beings on the lid overshadowing with their wings the Mercy Seat, which was where God's manifest presence would appear. A floor to ceiling curtain shut off the Holy of Holies from all else. No one was allowed past the curtain except the High Priest once per year. The very fact of the courts and curtains was a testimony to the people of God's distance from their contaminating sin.

2. Leviticus 16 – Once a year, on what was called Yom Kippur, the day of Atonement, the High Priest could go in to the Holy of Holies (Yom Kippur). He was the only one, and then only once a year. It would mean death on any other day, and there was a risk of death if he did not observe the proper ritual.

- Why all this formality and distance between God and the people? → God's holiness and our sinfulness

C. Isaiah's Fear – Isaiah 6:1-5

- Why does Isaiah respond in this way? → Here we see that Isaiah understood the holiness of the Lord, his own sinfulness, and the danger of coming into his presence for human beings, who are sinful.

D. Amazing Statements About Jesus (What is amazing about these statements?)

1. John 1:14 – He “tabernacled” among us.

- What is the significance of this statement? (That is also what is amazing about it.) → Jesus was God and the embodiment and revelation of the Divine Presence. He was a walking Temple/Holy of Holies! John's language deliberately refers to the Old Testament worship setting.

2. John 14:6-9 – Jesus reveals that he is the way into the Holy of Holies. He is the fearsome God of the OT!

3. John 15:13-15 – A relationship of friendship. The Lord of the universe, the fearsome God of the OT is our friend, looking out for our best interest.

E. Amazing Work of Jesus – Matthew 27:50-51

1. What kept us out of the Holy of Holies? → Sin.

- What was the significance of the veil being ripped, and top to bottom at that?

2. Sin was now dealt with in Christ. Free access to God's presence was declared for all who believe. "Top to bottom" indicates God's work. The curtain was torn from top to bottom by God.

F. Our Position Now – Hebrews 10:19-22; 12:18-24

- What is our position now before God with respect to worship? → Because of Jesus Christ's work on the Cross we can freely, and without fear, come into the presence of God. Jesus Christ is the right way into the true worship of the Father.

III. What is Worship?

(With this understanding we can now define worship and talk about how we enter in to it and do it.)

A. The chief end of man

- What is the chief end of man?

1. As the Westminster Catechism puts it: To glorify God and enjoy him forever. (This is summary of the Bible's teaching. See at a separate time, for example, Ephesians 1.)

2. John Piper clarifies: To glorify God *by* enjoying him forever.

-- How does replacing "and" with "by" clarify? What does that mean? → We glorify God by enjoying him/delighting in him/loving him/treasuring him/worshipping him

- What is the glory of God? What does it mean to glorify God?

3. The glory of God is the revelation of God as he is, and the fame, value, honor, beauty, greatness of his being. Simply, it is who he is and what he does, and the greatness of it. To glorify him is to reveal him/make him known and to honor him, praise him, declare his worth, greatness, beauty etc.

4. In Exodus 33:18-23; 34:5-8, God's glory, name, goodness, character (especially his love, mercy, grace, faithfulness, and justice), and presence are all used largely interchangeably.

5. John Piper, *Desiring God*, 41-43:

God's own glory is uppermost in His own affections. In everything He does, His purpose is to preserve and display that glory. To say that His own glory is uppermost in His own affections means that He puts a greater value on it than on anything else. He delights in His glory above all things. . . .

God's glory is the beauty of His manifold perfections. It can refer to the bright and awesome radiance that sometimes breaks forth in visible manifestations. Or it can refer to the infinite moral excellence of His character. In either case it signifies a reality of infinite greatness and worth. . . .

God's ultimate goal therefore is to preserve and display His infinite and awesome greatness and worth, that is, His glory. God has many other goals in what He does. But none of them is more ultimate than this. They

are all subordinate. God's overwhelming passion is to exalt the value of His glory. To that end, He seeks to display it, to oppose those who belittle it, and to vindicate it from all contempt. It is clearly the uppermost reality in His affections. He loves His glory infinitely. This is the same as saying: He loves himself infinitely. Or: He Himself is uppermost in His own affections. A moment's reflection reveals the inexorable justice of this fact. God would be unrighteous (just as we would) if He valued anything more than what is supremely valuable. But He Himself is supremely valuable. If He did not take infinite delight in the worth of His own glory, He would be unrighteous. For it is right to take delight in a person in proportion to the excellence of that person's glory.

- Does this mean God is selfish? If not, why not? → Because it is good, right, and just, as Piper explains. And if God is not righteous, then that would doom us all since the whole created order relies on him being righteous. Moreover, God is love. For him to value himself most is also for him to value love most. And if he did not, then there would be no good or salvation for anyone.
- How would you define worship?

B. Definitions:

1. Gerrit Gustafsen: The act and attitude of wholeheartedly giving ourselves to God. It is your love for God expressed. A worshipper/priest is one who draws near to God offering gifts and sacrifices.
 2. Chris Raker: Entering into the manifest presence of God.
 3. It is sacrifice (more later).
 4. Loving God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength.
 5. John Piper: Honoring God. Recognizing his honor, feeling the worth of it, and ascribing it to him in all the ways appropriate to his character. Gladly reflecting back to God the radiance of his worth.
 6. Showing forth God, revealing him as he is (i.e. glorifying him).
 7. Exalting God's glory (i.e. his manifold perfections); declaring forth the ultimate value of his being/glory; adoration.*
 8. The word "worship" is from the Old English word "weorthscipe" = "worthship" = worthiness. This captures the essence of the various biblical expressions for worship well, expressing the worth/worthiness of God.
- What stands out to you from this study? Has your perspective been changed in any way? Have you been convicted in some way or encouraged in some way? Anything that needs to be applied for you personally or for our church?

Conclusion to Part 1

Worship is the purpose of humanity, and the glory of God is the purpose of all things. In worship and the presence of the Lord, we find fulfillment and blessing. But because of our sin, we are not worthy in and of ourselves to be in God's presence or worship him. Yet in his great love and grace, God seeks worshipers and, through the work of Christ, has made the way for us to fulfill our purpose and enjoy this greatest of all blessings. It is our great privilege to enter into the presence of God and commune with him, delight in him, adore him, and exalt him and his worthiness. Let's devote ourselves to this. In the next study, we will look at the practical side of worship – what do we do in worship, how do we do it, and what should our attitude be in it?

Introduction to Part 2

In the last study, we began looking at worship. And how did we define that? → We actually looked at a number of possible definitions, but the essence of it is exalting God's glory and supreme worth and adoring him, expressing our love for God, delighting in him, praising him, etc. We talked about how worship is the purpose of our existence and that which will satisfy and bless our souls, but something we are not worthy or able to do on our own because of our sin. But God actually seeks worshipers and made the way for us to commune with him and worship him by Christ's sacrificial, atoning death for us and his resurrection from the dead. In this study, part two on worship, we will be looking at the practical side of worship – what do we do in worship, how do we do it, and what should our attitude be in it?

C. In accord with the biblical analogy of marriage for our relationship with the Lord (e.g., the Book of Hosea, Eph 5:22-33), worship is like the expression of love in marriage.

- How does love get expressed in marriage? And how might that apply to worship?
1. Broadly: Any action that expresses love/value for one's spouse, including service and sacrifice. This is love through action. Similarly, worship includes anything we do that shows forth the love/value of God's glory including obedience, service, and sacrifice. This is worship in deed/action. (Rom 12:1-2)
 - What does it mean to offer your body as a living sacrifice? → Rather than your body being killed in sacrifice, your entire being, represented by your body, is devoted to God and given over to do his will, obey him, etc. → Rom 6:11-13.
 2. Narrowly: The direct, focused expression of love/value for one's spouse to that spouse. This is basically love in word or symbolic act. Worship often refers to the direct, focused expression to God of his great worth, and of love and adoration of him. (Matthew 28:9, 17; Luke 24:52; John 12:20; 1 Cor 14:25)
 - What is the more important expression of love in marriage? In worship?
 3. Loving in action, which is often costly, and gives fuller meaning to love spoken. The difference is basically between saying and doing.
 - a. 1 Samuel 15:22 – What do we learn from this verse? → To obey is better than sacrifice. This could be confusing given how sacrifice can be the pinnacle of expression of love for someone, including God. But with God, obedience to him is even more fundamental. And obedience is typically itself sacrificial.
 - Why would God value obedience over sacrifice? → Because he is God and we owe him our obedience. We are to worship him on his terms, not ours. We don't get to dictate to him what he finds acceptable. If we sacrifice something to him for worship but walk in disobedience to him, it is empty. It puts our will over his + is self rather than God-centered.
 - b. Amos 5:21-24 – What do we see in these verses? → God hates worship offered by people who claim to love and follow him but do not. God values living out our faith more than merely saying it.
 4. Still, the Bible typically uses the terms for worship to refer to the direct, focused expression to God of love, adoration, praise, devotion, his great worth, etc. In the OT, this included sacrifices.
 - This is why we especially call the time that we focus on directly expressing love and praise to God in church, mostly in song, "worship." But it is important to remember that our entire

Sunday service is worship unto the Lord. It is called a worship service, and everything we do in it is part of worship, including listening to the sermon and fellowshiping.

5. Our worship should be vertically oriented primarily, ministry to God, making him happy, blessing him, etc.

6. Still, there is a horizontal dimension to our corporate worship in which we minister to and encourage one another in the Lord as part of our expression of worship to the Lord.

- Why would ministering to and encouraging one another while in the presence of God be part of our expression of worship to the Lord?

- a. Ministering to and encouraging one another accomplishes God's will, glorifies him, and expresses God's character of love. Doing these things expresses our love and submission to God.

- Where do you see vertical and horizontal dimensions to worship in Eph 5:18-20 and Col 3:15-17?

- b. In Eph 5:18-20, we speak to one another (horizontal) as we sing to the Lord (vertical); we give thanks to God (vertical), but even that encourages and strengthens others in the Lord (horizontal).

- c. In Col 3:15-17, we give ourselves to unity in Christ (horizontal), we teach and admonish one another through singing (horizontal) as we sing to God (vertical) and express thanksgiving to God (vertical).

D. When we gather in corporate worship, the Lord is present with us in a special way (Matt 18:20; 1 Cor 5:4).

- Matt 18 is straightforward, but how do we see this principle in 1 Cor 5:4 → Seems to indicate that when we are gathered together, the power of the Lord Jesus is present with us. (The context of 1 Cor 5:4 is a little difficult, but it is not actually necessary for this point to be seen in the verse. The important thing to see here at the moment is what we have just stated about Jesus in our gathering.)

E. In corporate worship, we are not spectators merely watching worship being performed by leaders, but we are participants who seek to commune and interact with the Lord directly and to delight in him and express love and adoration to him and to exalt him and to do his will as his people worship him.

1. Practical hint: During worship, don't wait around for what's coming next, but maintain focus on the Lord, continually giving him your attention, praising, praying, having intimate communion and fellowship with him.

2. Open worship: We are open to contributions to the worship of the Lord from the congregation as he leads. Be open to how the Lord would lead you to contribute to the worship of his name during corporate worship, such as through praying out, reading out Scripture, sharing something God has laid on your heart, praying with and over someone, operating in spiritual gifts, etc. (1 Cor 14:26).

3. Practical Hint: Engage your body in worship. Examples: Raise your hands; kneel; make motions that express the words you are singing or what you are feeling, etc.

4. Seek to be led by the Spirit in worship, to do what you sense God moving you to do, such as the things we have been talking about as part of open worship and using your body in worship.

- Does it seem strange to use your body in worship? To be led by the Spirit in worship?

IV. How do we worship? What should characterize our worship?

- See the handout, “How Do We Worship?” [Cover as seems appropriate in light of the time. At least highlight key points.]
- Question to consider asking if there is time:
 - Do you ever find it a “sacrifice” to worship?
 - What do you appreciate about worship?
 - Have you seen worship that is unbalanced? Dead? Too extreme? Chaotic, etc.?
 - Do you have any fears about worship? If so, how might you overcome them?

V. Q & A [Time permitting]

Conclusion

Jesus died so that we could enter God’s presence and commune with him and worship him. This is the purpose of our existence. Let us be people who worship by ministering unto God, worshiping him primarily on the basis of who he is rather than how we feel. Let us also worship him by ministering to one another. Let us worship God with our whole being, exuberantly, extravagantly, and sacrificially. And let us ask God, the one who is seeking, to make us worshippers who please him in our worship.