

“What is Worship?” Blandford and Langton Home Groups - Spring 2007

Information for Session 12

“Worship is ... For Life”

(Week beginning 29th April)

Why Worship God? by John W. Ritenbaugh

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The Bible reveals Christianity to be a comprehensive way of life. Nine times in the book of Acts, it is referred to as "the way," "this way," "that way," "the way of God," "the way of the Lord" or "the way of [salvation](#)." A way can be a path, course or road upon which one travels. It can also be a manner, method or system to achieve a desired goal. Being comprehensive, the Christian way touches on every element of life, but it focuses on the worship of the Creator God.

The title question is one whose answer is vital to our spiritual and physical well being. However, when we are asked why we [worship God](#), our answers are often vague because we take worshipping God for granted and never methodically think it through. The most basic answer is that He is the great and powerful Creator and we, the insignificant and weak creation. Therefore, we humble ourselves and submit.

Such reasoning is true and a good start, but that is all it is, a place to begin. In the church worship is something that is always there; it is woven into the fabric of our lives, and in far too many cases, we take it for granted. It is entirely possible that we have never considered even basic things about worshipping God. For instance, is God on an ego trip? Could our understanding of worship be far too narrow? Why does God want us to worship Him? Are there plain and practical reasons for it? Could it even be necessary for us to worship Him for Him to fulfill His purpose in us?

Grammatically, *worship* can be either a verb or noun. According to *Webster's Dictionary*, its verb form includes such synonyms as "esteem," "exalt," "revere," "glorify" and "respect." As a noun, it can encompass adoration, veneration, devotion, supplication and invocation. Its actual definition, though, is "reverence, honor or homage paid to God; ceremonies or services expressing such reverence." Worship thus includes both an attitude and the actions that accompany and are motivated by it.

The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery says, "Worship is first and foremost a verb, an action" (p.970). This is revealing because so many equate worship with either a place (usually a building) or a feeling. That worship is an action becomes clearer when we examine the roots of the Hebrew and Greek words for "worship." According to the *New Bible Dictionary*, both the "Hebrew *aboda*, and the Greek *latreia* originally signified the labor of slaves or hired servants" (p. 1262). Therefore, the underlying concept of worship in Scripture is that of service to the One revered. This understanding greatly expands the application of worship far beyond the walls of a building. It includes any activity done in service to and because of the one worshipped.

Worship is homage consisting of both an attitude of deep respect, adoration, reverence and even awe and the activities designed to describe the position and worth of the One worshipped. We must understand that biblically, the Creator initiates our worship of Him and that our response in worship is merely a reaction to His insertion of Himself into our lives. Most of the Old Testament allusions to worship are confined to services in or about the Tabernacle, the Temple, the sacrifices and festivals. They celebrate Him as Creator, Deliverer, Provider and Redeemer, and center on such things as the [Passover](#), Exodus, His miraculous provision in the wilderness and bountiful harvests.

In the New Testament, these "restraints" are greatly diminished. In fact, Jesus showed in [John 4:21](#) that worship in a place like the Temple is unnecessary. Further elaboration by Paul reveals that we are the Temple, and the worship of God expands to any time, any place, under any circumstance. This does not mean that fellowshiping as a congregation in a formal setting is no longer necessary, but it enlarges the idea and practice of worship beyond and besides the formal setting. In other words, worship expands right into the home, the work place, the bedroom, the kitchen, the highway and the ball field. In fact, worship includes all the activities one does as well as the formal religious setting. Thus, we have the opportunity through all our activities to show the high regard and homage we hold for the One we worship. We can see, then, that worship even plays a part in the quality of witness we make before the world, though it is an indirect fruit of worship.

Worshipping God plays a far more direct, positive and practical role in the completion of His purpose in us than we may have realized. We will see three solid reasons why He wants us to worship Him.

Is It a Requirement?

A man once told me that He would never bow his knee to God. He argued, "What kind of father wants his own children to bow down to him?" He thought it to be strange because he did not want his children to bow down to him. [Philippians 2:9-10](#) says, however, "Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth." So high and great is Jesus that eventually the knees of everyone born or created will bend in reverent homage to Him. This man was so blinded that he did not understand even this.

We might consider understanding the worship of God as simple, but doing it is not always easy. It is simple only after we have learned some basic things about it. I Chronicles 16 largely consists of a psalm of praise and thanksgiving David composed to commemorate the bringing of the Ark of the Covenant to the Tabernacle in Jerusalem. In verse 29, David writes, "Give to the LORD the glory due His name; bring an offering, and come before Him. Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness!"

Let us add to this [Matthew 4:9-10](#), the occasion of Satan's third temptation of Christ in the wilderness. "And he said to Him, 'All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, [Satan](#)! For it is written, "You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'""

These two verses clearly establish the most basic element of why we must worship God: **because He commands it!** He must command us to worship Him because it is possible to worship others and things besides God. Satan was clearly attempting to get Christ to worship him—a being besides God—and that Jesus replies, referring to the Father, "Him *only* you shall serve." Not only does He command us to worship Him, He also forbids us to worship any others. In addition, Jesus' statement shows the inextricable link between the worship and the service of God. It is as if they are synonymous. Worship involves highly regarding and then serving the One worshipped.

By definition, we worship what we choose to give the supreme devotion of our feelings, time and energies to. God must command us to worship Him because we can choose to give our feelings, time and energies to things other than God. Therefore, acceptable worship of God involves *consciously* choosing to worship and serve only Him even in the face of the temptation to give these things to others. Notice how [Psalm 45:10-11](#) shows that we must choose between alternatives that will present themselves from time to time. "Listen, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your own people also, and your father's house; so the King will greatly desire your beauty; because He is your Lord, worship Him."

The first four commandments directly address worship. Worship refers to the supreme honor and veneration given in thought and deed to the Creator. Those four commandments plus the tenth directly influence what we are to do or not do to fulfill the minimum requirements of this duty. If we do not do so, we are guilty of idolatry. No other sin has such a direct and concentrated focus of attention. The basic requirement is that we are to worship Him alone, and to allow any person or thing to usurp that position of lordship over us constitutes gross disobedience. The first and most basic reason why we worship God is that He commands it and forbids the worship of others.

Who Is Worthy?

Though God commands our worship, the second element we must consider is that **He deserves our worship**. What the Bible says about this tells us a great deal about what should be important to us. Many years ago, my wife and I visited my brother in a small city just north of Cincinnati, Ohio. At that time, my brother's sons were deeply involved in Little League baseball. This was also when Pete Rose was at his height of fame as a Cincinnati Reds baseball player. My brother complained that "every kid in Little League uses the Pete Rose batting crouch."

This is a familiar circumstance in our culture. Beards and goatees go in and out of style, as do low and high hemlines on women's dresses and pleats and cuffs on men's pants. Sometimes clothing and hairstyles become extremely different from what is accepted as normal by most people. They often become popular because someone, usually an entertainer of some notoriety, uses them as a mark of distinction. Then those who admire them adopt the same style, frequently to be perceived as "in" or "with it" by their peers. This imitation factor starts to work once admiration begins. It produces pressure to conform. Those who imitate the clothing styles, words and phrases, mannerisms or even the lifestyles of people they admire are really paying a measure of homage to them.

What is important in this principle is what we imitate and the qualities of those we are moved to imitate. Most assuredly, God wants us to imitate Him. He wants us to keep His commandments, which are a basic description of the way He would live were He a man. When Jesus became a man, He never sinned even once! In [John 5:19-20](#), He says:

Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel.

The apostle Paul confirms this principle in [1 Corinthians 4:16](#), where he strongly states, "Therefore I urge you, imitate me." In [1 Corinthians 11:1](#), he repeats, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ." Finally, in [Philippians 3:17](#), he writes, "Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern." In addition to Paul, Peter teaches us in [1 Peter 2:21](#) that Jesus set "us an example, that [we] should follow His steps." Imitation and conformity is a fact of life. However, these scriptures make clear that who and what we imitate is critical because much that we might strive to imitate within humanity is a sheer attention-seeking and statement-making vanity—and in some cases, downright degrading to both God and humanity. Do Pete Rose, other athletes, entertainers, politicians or whatever deserve our homage? It is one thing to admire or respect qualities in another, but admiration and respect begin to slip toward worship when imitation enters into the mix.

Clearly, God wants us to worship Him. But what is it about Him that He wants us to worship? [Psalm 99:5](#), 9 declares, "Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at His footstool; for He is holy. . . . Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at His holy hill; for the LORD our God is holy." [Psalm 100:4-5](#) adds, "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His [truth](#) endures to all generations." Knowing our strong tendency to imitate what we admire in others, God wants us to worship Him because of what He is and what He does. He wants us to worship Him because of His attributes and what they produce.

[Exodus 34:5-8](#) recounts an occurrence between God and Moses following the infamous Golden Calf incident. Moses badly needed to be reassured so he asks God to show him His glory. God not only responds by allowing Moses to see His back parts, but He also preaches what amounts to a sermon on a few of His attributes because His people need to understand where His real glory resides.

Then the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, [merciful](#) and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in [goodness](#) and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation." So Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped.

Psalm 99 succinctly states that we must worship Him because He is holy. The essential meaning of *holy*—sometimes translated as "sanctified"—is "different." The word comes from a root that means "to cut," implying to cut apart from, to separate from others. This is what suggests the essential meaning of different. One author says he prefers the meaning "a cut above" when God is under consideration, and this is a good choice because it gives God the honor due Him as transcendent in every aspect of His being.

His every attribute transcends the very best of [angels](#) or men. His [power](#), vision, wisdom, mercy, [kindness](#), goodness, [patience](#), judgment and any other quality that we might name are all higher than the heavens are above the earth. They are all immersed within and activated by His [love](#), which passes all understanding.

[Revelation 4:8-11](#) proclaims:

The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created."

In [Acts 10:24-26](#), when Peter enters into the home of the Gentile Cornelius the man falls at the apostle's feet and worships him. Peter lifts him up, saying, "Stand up; I myself am also a man." In [Revelation 19:10](#), John writes of his experience when confronted by an angel: "And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, 'See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.'"

This element of why we worship God is also clear. He and He only deserves to be worshipped because of what He is and what He does. No other being or thing we could venerate can even come close to matching the worth of giving worship to our great God.

The Imitation Factor Becomes Practical

Because the human desire to conform to what we admire and respect is so persuasive, ***we need to worship Him***. This desire is so strong that, if we do not give it to Him, we will probably give it elsewhere. It is true that we cannot find personal fulfillment or become the most and greatest that mankind can attain apart from the glad and worshipful submission and obedience to Him. Any who choose to give themselves to any other lord and master build their lives on quicksand. In this, we are dealing with another reality of life: A person can rise no higher than what he worships.

Remember, what we are dealing with in not obeying God's command to worship Him only is idolatry. This is a great sin, directly addressed by five of the Ten Commandments. No other sin receives such direct attention because idolatry, the rejection of God as Ruler, stands at the base of virtually every sin, beginning with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Therefore, anyone who does not worship God and Him only is by default worshipping something other and lesser than He is. Such a person will fail to reach the highest and greatest in life because the true God is supreme over all.

[Psalm 115:3-11](#) addresses this:

But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; eyes they have, but they do not see; they have ears, but they do not hear; noses they have, but they do not smell; they have hands, but they do not handle; feet they have, but they do not walk; nor do they mutter through their throat. Those who make them are like them; so is everyone who trusts in them. O Israel, trust in the LORD; He is their help and shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD ; He is their help and shield.

Once we get past the context of the times in which this psalm was written, its instruction becomes clear. In those days, idols of stone, wood and metal fashioned into the form of an angel, man, beast or half-man/half-beast were common. People worshipped before these figures and tried to conform their lives to what they thought its will was. The lesson is that a man can rise no higher or be no stronger than his idol. An idol—anything worshipped that is not the Creator God—is inadequate. It can do nothing to improve what the man is.

Compare this to those who allow their admiration for an athlete, entertainer or politician to slide into idolatry. What are they worshipping? Just another frail and fallible human being. Conforming to their idol's way may earn them notoriety within their peer group or community—it may even earn them a great deal of money. In this life, they could even become "greater" than their idol, but in the end, what and where are they? They are still just frail and fallible human beings just like the one they worshipped. Worshipping anything less than God does not enable us to rise above being merely human.

Those who worship and trust the Lord Almighty can rise high above what they are because He is their God and Source of unlimited strength. Through the fruit of imitation, those who consciously choose to worship God gradually conform to His image, becoming increasingly like Him. Those who are like Him in Spirit and character will be the ones He lifts all the way into birth into His Family, the [Kingdom of God](#), through a [resurrection from the dead](#). He looks at them and sees a reflection of Himself. Though we now bear the image of the earthy, we shall bear the image of the heavenly ([I Corinthians 15:49](#)). Paul reveals, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" ([II Corinthians 3:18](#)).

[Colossians 3:23-24](#) adds, "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord, you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ." Our service to God is primarily one of conforming to Him and His Son Jesus Christ. Worshipping Him is a major factor in this process. In so doing, we become "His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" ([Ephesians 2:10](#)).

We worship Him because He commands it. We worship Him because He alone deserves it, knowing what He is and what He does. We worship Him because without so doing we cannot rise to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.