



BOOK 38

WORSHIP
GOD

Biblical Research Library

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INTRODUCTION

*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 passage portrays the nature of all sons of God as the holy priesthood of faith. We are spiritual beings trapped in a clump of dust, yearning to pour out our hearts in worship to our 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. We are created after the image of God (Gn 1:26,27). That simple fact means that it is natural for the created to worship the Creator. It is unnatural if the created does not worship. From the beginning when God first breathed into Adam the breath of life, Adam became a worshipful being. God put within Adam that which would naturally turn to Him in worship. Adam’s worship was not defined, neither was it programmed, commanded, or reduced to rituals of worship. It was only natural, for those created after the image of God must worship their Creator. Our first definition of worship, therefore, is that worship involves response of the spiritual image that is within man to the awesomeness of our Creator. It is not about the worshipers. It is all about the One who created us as worshipful beings.

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

Before any written revelation was given to man, men worshiped God. Before God revealed any sacrificial expressions of worship, man worshiped. It is for this reason that worship is not defined by ceremo-

nial procedures or performances that we would construct after our own imagination or deduct from the pages of the Bible. If there were no written revelation from God, man would still be a worshipful being, though he would invent some system or means by which to express his worship. It is for this reason that 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.

Man was created a worshipful being. Because worship is within the very being of man, God did not have to implant within man a robotic system to perform certain legal actions of worship. Neither did He program man to worship according to prescribed systems or ceremonies of worship. Since worshipful beings invent something to worship, God had to reveal to man guidelines that would direct him from worshipping that which he would create after the imagination of his thinking. The problem is that man is a free-moral being who often harbors a spirit of rebellion. He thus misdirects his worship. He becomes an idolater. Men seek to be free from the restrictions of God, but at the same time, they must worship. The result of this inner turmoil within man has been a history of idolatry since the days when man took the first step away from the true and living God in order to live according to his own rules. Moreover, in living according to his own rules, he has invented rules of worship according to his own desires.

The idolater first creates a god after his own being, and then, he creates a religion and worship that conforms to his carnal desires. From

***One must know
God in order to
worship Him
acceptably.***

the first step man took away from God, God began to call men back to worship of Him only, and not the creation of their imaginations. In order to direct his conduct in worship, God has revealed the vanity of man's schemes of worship. In re-

vealing the vanity of such worship schemes, it is God's call to all men to return to worship in spirit and truth.

We live in a world wherein Christendom is defined by a confused assortment of worship ceremonies and expressions that are often con-

trary to the true worship that is defined in the Bible. It is assumed by the vast majority of those who call themselves under the name “Christian” that God accepts all sorts of expressions of worship, regardless of the behavior of the worshiper or his beliefs. This theology of worship has subsequently produced a wide spectrum of what is defined as worship. By the time of Jesus’ ministry, many of the Jews had again created their own theology of worship. However, Jesus called their worship “vain worship.” Paul used the term “self-made” worship. We would conclude, therefore, that God does not accept all worship, regardless of the sincere outpouring on the part of the worshiper. Simply because something is defined as worship by man does not mean that it is worship of God.

We live in a confused world of worshipers who have created vain and misleading worship that is imposed on millions throughout the world. Our only recourse out of this confusion of ritualistic worship is to identify, or verify our worship in the pages of the Bible. When we study the sincere worship of men and women of faith in the Bible, then we can begin to understand that our religious world is full of confusion concerning worship of the one true and living God. When our worship of God is validated by His instructions, we feel assured by His word that we are pleasing to Him. 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 into the word of God in order that they not stray from the object of their worship.

***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, than offer a legal prescription for worship. The word of God is a guide to keep us away from creating a god after our own imagination, and then creating worship of this imagined god. Thus God’s instructions concerning worship are given in order to redirect our attention toward God and worship of Him only. Revelation was not given for the purpose of giving man a legal performance of worship by which one

would be assured before God that he is worshiping God correctly if he performs the correct system of worship. Revelation was given in order that we know the one true and living God. And in knowing Him, we, through a knowledge of His revelation, 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 and honor. Worship can be poured out to the imaginations that men create in their own minds, which worship is often focused on some material object that men have made in order to remind them of some god or spirit they have imagined. The Old Testament is filled with examples of men who gave worship to the creations of their own minds and craftsmanship of their own hands, and thus were idolatrous in their religiosity. We can learn from the misguided worshipers of the Old Testament (Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:11). What we primarily learn is that we must caution ourselves concerning our worship. Not all worship is true. And since not all worship is true, then we are encouraged to seriously check our worship with the word of God.

There are some key expressions in Scripture that give us a preliminary definition of the heart of the worshiper. *“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). *“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). *“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 for the source of his existence. It is praise and adoration that pours forth from the human spirit in appreciation for the preservation of one’s existence. Worship is veneration and homage, emotion and intellect that instinctively flow from the inner soul of the created. It is not something that is ceremonialized through actions and rituals, but spontaneously offered up by spiritually

responsive individuals who recognize 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 investigate the Bible. Once we investigate the word of God, it is necessary that we base our worship on the foundation of its instructions concerning worship. In order to begin our search for true worship, there are several words, both in Hebrew and Greek, that are used in the Bible in reference to worship.

A. **Worship is bowing down before God.**

The Hebrew word that is used most often to define worship in the Old Testament 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*” in order to manifest respect and honor (Gn 23:7). However, *shahah* is used in a worship context when Abraham went to the place where he was commanded by God to offer his son. He told his servants once they arrived at the place, “*Stay here with the donkey. I and the lad will go there and worship [shahah]*” (Gn 22:5). In the worship contexts of the word *shahah* there was an inward bowing down of the heart that was manifested by a literal prostrating of the body of the worshiper on the ground. “*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).

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

“O come and let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker” (Ps 95:6).

Inherent in the word *shahah* in a worship context, one bows down in his heart. In the Old Testament context where the word is used, the worshiper actually bowed prostrate before the Lord, often on the ground, because he first “bowed down” in his heart. The word *shahah* expresses the natural reaction of the created toward the Creator. True worship, therefore, must be manifested in one humbling himself before God. Though one may not always have the opportunity to physically bow down, the bowing down in one’s heart is certainly manifested in the heart of the true worshiper. The metaphorical application of *shahah* in worship would speak contrary to what is often practiced in assemblies wherein attendees behave as if they were at a rock concert.

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 simply means “to kiss.”

Proskuneo was an ancient custom of the Persians. They would bow down before a king 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 time of Jesus, *proskuneo* was used by Jesus when He said 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.

One could physically bow down as a manifestation of honor without a heart of worship. However, one could not have a heart of worship without bowing down and “kissing toward” the King of all things. The soldiers of Pilate’s court *proskuneo* before Jesus at the time of His trials, but they did not worship Him (Mk 15:19). An outward physical expres-

sion of *proskuneo*, therefore, does not necessarily constitute worship. But when men 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 word for worship in the New Testament is the word *sebomai*. This word is used ten times in the New Testament and refers to reverence, or to hold something in awe. The original meaning of *proskuneo* emphasized the outward manifestation of worship, while *sebomai* focuses more on the inward soul of man and his feelings of awesomeness in reference to his Creator. “Now a certain woman named Lydia ... worshiped [*sebomai*] God” (At 16:14).

Titius Justus was “one who worshiped God” (At 18:7; see vs 13; 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. Because they were *sebomai* in their hearts, they *proskuneo* before God.

*The obedient life
is defined
by worship.*

D. Worship is giving service to the Lord.

The third word that is used in the New Testament in reference to worship is *latreuo*. This word means “to render religious service,” “give homage,” or “to worship.” In the strictest sense of the definition of the word reference is to the worshiper offering gifts or service in worship of God. “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; see Hb 10:2). 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” (More later).

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 it could be expressed in certain outward actions and behavior, such as bowing down in homage or serving in response to one’s worship of God. Such things as singing and praying are not 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. The partaking in eating and drinking is not worship. No action of man is worship in and of itself. One can certainly partake of the Lord’s Supper and sing without worshipping. One can help his neighbor in serving his needs without doing so in worship of God. When one worships, his worship is often expressed outwardly. We must keep in mind, however, that one can worship without any outward expressions or actions. Worship is internal. It pours forth from the heart.

Worship is purely internal and mental, and thus, it sometimes finds its expression in one’s behavior. This is the essence of 1 Corinthians 11:29. “*For he who eats and drinks not discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment to himself.*” One can externally eat and drink the Lord’s Supper, but have an inward heart that is full of carnal feelings. If one

***Thanksgiving
to God
is expressed
through
sacrificial
service.***

eats and drinks with a carnal heart, he is not worshipping. Actions never cause one to worship. Worship results in action in one’s life. It is for this reason that external crutches that are used to generate worship in the heart, as mechanical music, physical environments, solemn ceremonies, incense and sanctuaries, often present a false sense of worship simply because those who

rely on such external crutches have often not given their hearts in worship of God. They are often simply carrying out religious rituals that are

confused with true worship.

Worshipful saints can bring their spirit of worship together in assemblies. They do not go to worship. If our thinking is that we go to the “hour” and “place” of worship, then we have missed the point. Worship must take place in an individual’s heart regardless of his presence with others. Unfortunately, we live in a time of Christendom wherein “worship” is too often confined to places, times and assemblies. However, when we “walk with worship warriors” in chapter 4, we will discover that worship is a spiritual characteristic of God’s people regardless of where they are or what time it is during the day. Worship warriors worship God individually first. Worship with others is a serendipity of the believer’s common fellowship with one another, and when the believers have the opportunity to be in one another’s presence.

*True worship
cannot be
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places or
limited by
performances.*

Chapter 2 **WORSHIP: WHO AND HOW**

We certainly live in a world of confusion in reference to man’s worship, for men seem to worship every imaginable god in every imaginable manner. God created us to be worshipful beings, and thus, we would assume that He also revealed in His word both Himself and how He would be worshiped. God revealed Himself through the fathers of extended families before His revelation through written word (Hb 1:1,2). The vast majority of the world, however, does not believe in the Bible. The result is a world that is populated with people who neither know God, nor have any desire to study His revelation to man in order to discover how He desires to be worshiped.

*The sons
of God
will worship
only their
Father.*

This would be true also of the world of Christendom wherein many assert to be “Christian,” but have no knowledge of the word of God. From a recent Barna Group report, an interesting point came forth from

recent studies in reference to the religiosity of the American culture. “The Christian Church,” it was 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). In their ignorance of the word of God, most “believers” of Christendom 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. 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 worship of the God as it revealed in the Bible. 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 understand how one would refrain 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 men do not need to be taught to worship God. Worship is a natural instinct of man because he was created after the image of God. It is for this reason that the Bible was not given as a manual on worship. From our study of the Bible, we do not learn how to be inspired to worship. We learn who to worship and how to worship Him according to His pleasure.

A. The object of our worship:

As will be discussed later, there is such a thing as vain worship (Mt 15:8,9) and self-made worship (Cl 2:20,23). 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 God through His revelation. 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.

In their ignorance of the word of God, men have worshiped the sun, moon and stars. Some have worshiped angels, or figments of their own imagination. 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. He was instructed who to worship. Jesus reminded Satan, “*You will worship the Lord your God and Him only will you serve*” (Mt 4:10). In the Old Testament we have recorded history of how men worshiped the gods of Baal, Molech and a host of other imagined gods they created after their own imagination. 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 created images of their imagined gods (See Is 10; compare 1 Kg 18:17-46).

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

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 would be worshiped by the created. It is for this reason that philosophies as evolution destroy man’s desire to worship God. If men were not the result of a creating God, then they 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 believ-

ers in the one true God to discover acceptable worship. Since God is our creator, then we would correctly conclude that He has the right to be worshiped according to His instructions, not according to our carnal desires.

B. True worship:

When the Samaritan woman encountered Jesus, Jesus' conversation with her eventually led to a very profound statement. Jesus said, "*But the hour is coming and now is when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such to worship Him.*

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

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,*" then we must conclude that our worship of the Father is to be according to the definition of what Jesus stated, that worship is to be in spirit and in truth.

1. *Worship in spirit:* In the context of His statement, Jesus generally defined what He meant by worship in spirit. Worship in spirit is based on the fact that God is spirit. The obvious conclusion is that God is not worshiped with the mechanical inventions of men. Regardless of the creation of 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). It is fallacious for one to claim to use something of this world in order to worship Deity who is spirit, and thus, not of this world. God did not create a physical world of instruments by which He seeks to be worshiped. He created the spirit of man that is in His image. Only by this spirit does He seek to be worshiped.

All aids one may use in generating a worshipful spirit within him-

self are of no value in worship of the God who is spirit. God is not listening or seeing those things that are of this world. As spirit, He is unconcerned about sounds or material creations that are the product of man's hands. This is the thought of Paul's statement to the Athenians.

"The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of

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

heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands as though He needed anything, since He gives life to all, breath and all things" (At 17:24,25). Under-

standing this one statement of Scripture is enough to convince us that any efforts on the part of man to worship God with mechanical instruments, elaborate building structures, "holy" images, incense, or anything that is the product of this material world, cannot be used to worship God who seeks to be worshiped in spirit. Such things may be used by man to produce an atmosphere wherein man seeks to worship. But we must never forget that man must worship God directly from the spirit of his heart, not via something that is of the material world. How can the One who gives life to all be worshiped by that which has no life?

Worship of God in spirit is the foundation for Paul's statement in Ephesians 5:19, that we speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, *"singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."* The one who is using physical or mechanical inventions in worship must realize that God is not observant of physical structures, nor is He impressed with mechanical inventions. He is listening to the hearts of those who are using the instrument of their voices to speak 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 hinder both the speaking of the saints to one another in song, as well as taking the place of voicing words of praise 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 teach-

ing of one another through song when the worshipers cannot hear one another for the clamor of the instruments that are amplified through rock concert speakers.

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 pay homage to the Creator of one's spirit. Physical things as mechanical music, sanctuaries, idol images and incense have nothing to do with the worship of one's heart. Worshipers today may have become inept at stirring worship in their hearts without the aid of something that appeals to the senses of man. But true worshipers are not spiritually handicapped, and thus, they are not in need of an empirical crutch to generate an atmosphere or spirit of worship. True worship in spirit is spontaneous. It comes from the naked heart of man and is poured out individually and directly to one's Creator and Savior, regardless of the environment in which one is or the sound that comes to his ears, or the images presented before his eyes, or the aromas that come to his nose. True worshipers need no empirical crutches.

God is a Holy Spirit, and thus, one must worship Him in the holiness of one's spirit (See Is 1:15,16). He is a benevolent Spirit, and thus, those who worship Him must worship with a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving (See Ps 100:1,2; 122:1; 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 totality of man's mental abilities (See Mt 15:5,6; 22:37). God is a Spirit that cannot be seen with the eyes of men, and thus, He must be worshiped in faith (See Ex 20:4,5; 2 Co 5:7; Gl 5:19,20).

*The Spirit, God,
seeks to be
worshiped
In spirit.*

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 Spirit who forgives, 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 nothing of this world in order to be worshiped by those who are confined to this world. If one would thus seek to worship God, then he must link through his own spirit with the God who is spirit. He must bypass all that is physical in order to transcend to Him who is pure spirit. The less one encumbers himself with that which is carnal and physical, the greater his access will be into a mental spiritual realm wherein he can be touched by God in worship.

2. *Worship in truth:* Since all that God is is real and true, then certainly if one would approach God in worship, he would seek to understand the God he worships. We would assume, therefore, that God would give some direction to our worship lest we turn to our own inventions. The problem with men and their inventions of worship is that we often become subservient to our inventions. The inventions often take over and the worshipers become servants to the inventions. This is the spirit of idolatry. The worshiper creates a god after his own imagination, and then his imagination takes control of his worship. We also create worship crutches by which we seek either to perform or to create an atmosphere of worship. Our crutches then take over in that we cannot worship without the crutches.

*He who is truth
is worshiped
only by those
who walk
in His truth.*

Since God seeks to be worshiped in truth, we would correctly conclude that those who are ignorant of His word would invent their own means by which they worship. Those who have little knowledge of the word of God, therefore, submit themselves to a spirit of idolatry. The spirit of idolatry leads us to create gods we can understand and manipulate. Once we have created the god, then we assume that the god we have created in our minds seeks to be worshiped according to our own inventions. Throughout history, men have invented false gods and worship that appeals to the carnal desires of the worshipers. We would assume that this religious venture is common among those who claim to be believers, and yet have little knowledge of the Bible. The worship of the biblically ignorant, therefore, is filled with misguided practices that

are contrary to the word of God.

When we lived in Brazil many years ago, we picked up the newspaper one day and read of how one “Christian” group had taken five or six of the babies of the church group, bound them, and drowned them in the sea at the beach in worship. 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 his worship is not directed by God, then he will invent rituals, systems and ceremonies of worship according to how he believes his imagined god is supposed 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 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 the word of God, is not true, and thus, 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 pleasing to the God of the Bible.

It is not that God has prescribed a legal formula for acceptable worship. If God had prescribed expressions or acts of worship that must legally be carried out in order to validate one’s worship, then men would eventually conduct such expressions or acts as a religious ceremony with no worship at all. Once men legalize acts or performances of worship, they then make judgments of others that they are not worshipping God according to the prescribed legal system or ceremony of worship. This does not mean, however, that we cannot discover in the pages of

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

the word of God expressions of worship that were carried out by faithful people of God. The expression of worship of some was what they offered according to the instructions of God, that is, 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 water his camels in fulfillment of his prayer to God (Gn 24:26). However, it is stated only that the servant bowed down. It is not stated if he closed his eyes, or raised his hands to heaven, sang a song, or even said anything. He simply worshiped when he perceived the providential work of God to provide a wife for Isaac.

When one seeks to be true in heart to God, then he will worship God in truth. 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 seek to live as expressions of God to all humanity. We are thus directed as God's sons by His word to live in service to all men (Gl 6:10).

Romans 12:1 is a key passage that opens a door concerning the worshipful service of the sons of God. *"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 *letreuo* is here translated "service," as it is also translated in Romans 9:4. The root meaning of the word is simply "service." Some have assumed that all that we do is worship. This view has been based on statements as 1 Corinthians 10:31. *"Therefore, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."*

There is a difference between worship and service, though some service may be in worship of God. For example, you clean your house every day. The cleaning of your own house is only your duty for yourself, since you do not want to live in a dirty house. You do not clean your house in worship to God. However, my cleaning of your house can be in worship to God. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:15, *"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."* Because of the overwhelming grace of God I realize in my own life, I may be moved to

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

clean your house in service to your needs. When I understand the mercy of God toward me, it is only reasonable that I serve you. In the true sense of the phrase “worship service,”

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

I have worshiped God in serving you. 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). The thought would be completed by Paul’s statement in Colossians 3:17. “*And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*” 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 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 our theological course to discover in Scripture such a legal system of worship, and are honest with ourselves, then we will find ourselves to be inconsistent and frustrated. We will find ourselves divided as each Bible student comes forth with a greater or lesser number of acts and ceremonies of worship. We do not think that God would so frustrate His worshipers. We do not think that He would leave His people to their

***Worship is never
limited or confined
by legal actions.***

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 actions, 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 can confess what irrational humbugs we often become when we go to war with our fellow brother over those

things we propose to be correct performances of worship.

True worship is not validated by the performances of a worship formula. When Abraham left his three servants, he went with Isaac to a place to worship alone with Isaac (Gn 22:5). When the child of David died, he washed himself, changed his clothes, and went alone to the house of the Lord and worshipped (2 Sm 12:20). These and many other worshipers in the Bible did not seek to worship by some ritual in order that their worship be true. 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 to their Creator. When men feel inspired and thankful to God, they worshipped. When any of God's children seek to live true to their God, they worship in truth in that they do not worship after their own inventions. If a son of God is alone in a desert, he can worship without any mechanical crutches and without performing any acts of worship. It is ludicrous to assert that true worship is bound to or confined to the crutches of ceremonies or ritualistic performances. In fact, unless one can strip himself of all the modern performances, electronic gear, and sanctuaries wherein men seek to stimulate and "practice" worship, he will never learn the spirit of spontaneous worship. If one seeks to learn 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 true 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 the environment.

One cannot worship God in truth unless he worships God in spirit. As a child seeks to obediently respond to a loving father, so the obedient respond in a worshipful spirit to the Father who loved them 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. Find a desert, or place of solitude in order to find God.

Chapter 3

WAYWARD WORSHIP

God as our creator is the Father of our spirits that He created for every human being (Hb 12:9). It is the natural instinct for man to worship because he has 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 the 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 worship, and how He seeks to be worshiped.

In the absence of the knowledge of who God is, men will seek out some object or some spirit to worship. God said of His people Israel in their state of apostasy, *“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. They simply forgot the law of God, and thus, they created a religion that conformed to their own desires. And once they had created a religion after their desires, it was only natural that they create a god who would condone their behavior.

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

We could say the same of many today who have either forgotten the law of God, or who desire to have no knowledge of His law. Because they are worshipful beings, they create worship after their own inventions. Both Jesus and the New Testament evangelists encountered such people in the 1st century. Our study of these encounters helps us to look to ourselves and those around us in Christendom in order to determine the true worshipers of God today.

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 historical 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 their vain worship are both revealing and definitive:

1: *Binding where God has not bound:* In the context of this encounter of Jesus with the religious leaders, the Pharisees and priests observed that the disciples of Jesus did not 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 tradition of the Jews. They had religiously bound something on the people that God had not bound. Their tradition had thus become a religious law, and the occasion by which they judged if others were conforming to their religious structures.

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 give true worship to God. They 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

***Our obedience
to the commands
of God qualifies
our worship to be
acceptable to Him.***

them as hypocrites, which reference was both to their behavior and to their worship (Mk 7:6). It is in this context that Jesus quoted Isaiah, whose initial message of the words were to an 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. Those who refuse to obey the gospel, therefore, worship God in vain. The obedient demeanor of one’s life validates his worship before God as true.

3. Lip worship: We can understand Jesus’ rebuke of their “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 manifested an outward legal worship that was void of inner commitment to the commandments of God in all areas of their behavior. Their hearts were far from God simply because they had rejected the commandments of God.

4. Vain worship: Because their hearts were far from reverence for the will of God, their worship was constructed after the traditions of men. Though they performed what appeared to be worship of God, God considered their worshipful performances worthless. We would caution ourselves, therefore, when we approach God in worship.

*True worship
is validated
by true
obedience.*

The worshiper must determine if his worship is according to what pleases him, or what pleases God. If one seeks to live according to the commandments of God, then his worship is not in vain. In Christendom today there are untold numbers of worshipers who banner 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 their worship is vain.

5. Laying aside the commandment of God: Herein is revealed the origin of vain worship. We have found that many “Christian” churches

who worship God care little for the word of God. And because they care little for the word of God, they are defensive about their worship. However, true worshipers are very sensitive to the fact that their worship pours forth from an obedient heart. In the context of the religious leaders whom Jesus encountered, these religionists cared little for the will of God. They were more concerned about maintaining their traditions than in honoring God through obedience to His commandments. Jesus' conclusion and application to their worship is obvious. If one has little concern for the commandments of God, then certainly he cannot worship God in truth. Those who willingly disregard the word of God 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 those who worship God with life-styles that are contrary to the will of God, to repent in order to worship God in spirit and truth. They have constructed a religious behavior after their own desires, 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 truth. A religious heritage that is not based on the word of God will not lead one to worship God in truth.

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 speaks in Colossians 2:20-23. The connection is that when religious people willingly reject the will of God, they will impose on themselves a worship that is after their own desires. Paul wrote, "*Therefore, if you died with Christ from the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourselves to 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 manifested in their religion. Paul’s immediate answer to such legal religiosity was not to touch, taste or handle. Such things

*Entertainment
originates
from outside.
Worship
originates
from inside.*

would profit nothing in reference to salvation simply because they pass away with those who invented them. However, Paul did make a statement that should shock religionists today who would defend the legal religiosity about which he spoke. *“These things have indeed a show of wisdom”* We are

reminded of the countless assemblies in Christendom where their is a “show” going on to entertain 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 the audience. Once the show is over, the audience goes home only with 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 supposed wisdom of the self-made religious performance may appeal to man, but we must not confuse such with worship. This is the deceptive nature of theatrical worship that is performed by a select few, for the entertainment of the audience. It is not wrong to be entertained, but we must always keep in mind that entertainment is about us. Worship is totally about God.

Self-made religion is a show to man, not God. It is thus 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 worship. Such would be 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 to the audience. We might assume that God is being worshiped while we are being entertained, but in entertainment our minds are focused on the entertainers, not God.

***Entertainment
flows In
through the
senses.
Worship
flows out from
the heart.***

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 presentation that we are worshiping God, when actually we are “touching,” “tasting” and “handling” a self-made religion. We must keep in mind what Paul said, that such religious behavior 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 men die. 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).

(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 are to be edified. Paul instructed that teaching be accomplished through song. Singing to one another does not always mean that everyone assembled is to sing simultaneously. It is the gift of some that have been blessed with beautiful voices to 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 talent to minister to others by teaching in song. As a preacher, who has the gift to speak, has the right to use his gift to minister through vocal teaching, so the singer has the right to use his 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 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. 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 commandments of men. In the context of Acts 17, Paul encountered those who had no revelation from God concerning whom He was or how He was to be worshiped. They were thus worshiping unknown gods they had created after their own imagination. And because they were worshiping the creation of their imaginations, they had imposed on themselves self-made worship.

Paul stood up on the Areopagus in Athens and said, “*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 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 no greater

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

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 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.

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 “Unknown God,” will seek revelation from this God. Paul revealed this God to the Athenians. Through the revelation of the Bible, the same God is revealed today. Those who are ignorant of the Bible will continue in their ignorant worship. However, it is incumbent upon all men 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).

*The creation
manifests
the Creator.*

From the statements that were made by Scripture in reference to vain, self-made and ignorant worship, we would conclude that none of these is 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 will 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 truth. 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.

Chapter 4 **WALKING WITH TRUE WORSHIPERS**

We live in a religious world where men have invented every sort of religious behavior, from which springs every imaginable expression of worship. The worship of non-Christian religions is centered around man-conceived and self-imposed religiosity by which men seek to express homage to their gods. And in reference to Christendom, countless worshipers have burdened themselves with a host of emotional gymnastics that have either hindered, or led them to forget any resemblance of the worship that is expressed by dedicated saints throughout the pages of the Bible.

We have allowed our minds and behavior in worship to be twisted 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.

In this chapter we thought it would be good to go back to the pages of Sacred Scripture in order to rediscover worship. In order to do this, we must follow those heroes of faith who poured out their inner souls in

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

worship of God. In taking this walk with faithful worshipers, we can examine ourselves in order to make our own judgments concerning our homage to the God of heaven. Since we live in a Christen-

dom that seems to identify theatrical performances 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 and character 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 rock-concert assemblies today in the religious world that are substituted for the true worship we see in the Bible. Our purpose in walking with worshipers in the word of God is to return to the simplicity of worship in our efforts to discover true worship of our Father, worship that is in spirit and in truth.

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. Abraham slept the night, and then, he 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.'*"

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 away in order to worship alone. He 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 only by the two in the solitude of the wilderness.

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

It 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 that Abraham believed that if he did administer death to his only son Isaac, God would raise him from the dead (See Hb 11:17-19).

In Abraham’s worship on this occasion, he was giving up something that he dearly loved. He was worshiping by giving up his only son. Isaac was worshiping by giving up his only 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, they remained at attention by the command of God while the Son of God willingly died that all men might live.

B. Abraham’s servant worshiped:

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 24:3). 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 knelt 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 asked of God that the damsel from whom he would ask water for his camels 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 requests, for Rebekah was 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 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 toward God. All that we are told concerning his actions was that he bowed down his head. No ceremonies were performed. No assembly was called. His worship was spontaneous. It was solemn and where he was at the time he recognized the providential work of God. Those who worship in spirit need only to perceive the work of God in their lives. They do not need the working performance of others in their presence in order to be stirred to worship.

***Worship
can be
expressed
in solitude
and
silence.***

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 their deliverance. 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 Israel was in the presence of God at Mount Sinai, they worshiped (Ex 24:1). When they saw the pillar of cloud at the door of the tabernacle, *“all the people rose up and worshiped”* (Ex 30:10). When men understand that God is working in their lives, they worship in thanksgiving of God’s work. Worship results from men who are in awe of God’s presence in our lives. Worship results from the teaching of God’s word. The act of teaching is not worship on the part of the audience, though the teacher may be worshipping in service of God. The audience would be listening. The teaching of the word would inspire the audience to worship.

**Worship
results from
one’s encounter
with God.**

D. Joshua worshiped:

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

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 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 a 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 when they believed that the newly born babe was the promised Messiah. Again, there was no fanfare, calling for an assembly, or generation of emotional hysteria. Their worship came forth from their hearts in their solitude presence of the Son of God.

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 of people, a leper came and worshiped Him (Mt 8:1,2). Though surrounded by so many people, one individual was able to worship alone. He was able to focus exclusively on Jesus in the presence of so many distractions. His worship was not generated

***Worship
does not
depend on
the presence
of other
worshippers.***

by those who were around him, but regardless 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 the presence of others.

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 worshiped in the midst of a multitude who were only listening to the teaching of Jesus.

*Individuals
can worship
among
multitudes
of people.*

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 comes and worships in their midst regardless of the teaching of Jesus or the presence of others.

I. The disciples worshiped:

In Mark 6 it is recorded that Jesus walked on water (Mk 6:48). When the disciples beheld the marvelous incident, they were terrified and cried out. Jesus reassured them, "*Be of good cheer. It is I. Do not be afraid*" (Mk 6:5). 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. However, 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 calmed. There was dead silence all around them. They were overcome with the 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 thus, realizing that they were in the presence of the Son of God, they were inwardly overcome with awe. They worshiped.

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

There was no hysteria, no crying out in remorse or anxiety. We can only imagine the awesomeness they had in their minds of Jesus as they quietly bowed themselves to the floor of the boat to the One who had power over the winds and the seas.

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

Our perception of the awesomeness of God explodes in worship.

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, worshiping 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 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 God, they wor-

shipped. When people heard 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 with thankful hearts. Worship 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 5

WORSHIP ANYWHERE AND ANYTIME

One of the most profound teachings of Jesus on worship is found in John 4 where the Samaritan woman encountered Jesus. At one time in the conversation, the woman perceived that Jesus was a prophet (Jn 4:19). In order to shift the conversation from her sinful relationship with a man with whom she was living, the woman brought up the subject of locations of worship.

The woman was a Samaritan, a mixed race of people who were not true Jews, nor did they worship according to the restrictions of the Jews. 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 conversation to reveal what had always been true in reference to 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 anytime and anywhere.

“Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem worship the Father” (Jn 4:21). In their apostasy 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). In their apostasy, they

desired to be in a particular place and environment in order to worship gods they had created after their own imagination. 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 be divided, with the northern ten tribes eventually going into Assyrian captivity in 722/21 B.C. God knew that the southern two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, with a remnant that had come 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 for worship. The Samaritans, who resided in the territory of the former northern kingdom of Israel, established their own place of worship. But in the context of John 4, Jesus revealed that the time had come when worship would not be confined to places. Worship had never been so confined.

***The universal
nature of the church
necessitates
universal worship.***

The hour had come when God's people, whether Samaritans, Jews or Gentiles, would not worship God in the confinement of a physical structure, or a specific location. True worship would exist throughout the world in the hearts of those who would come to the Father in spirit and truth. The fact that Christianity would go into all the world necessitated that worship of Christians never be confined to specific locations. 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 worship.

We go 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). However, neither the place, hour, nor environment 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 defined by “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 anytime and anywhere.

Epilogue

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 word or our worship. Our presence with two or three other people does not validate our worship. Neither does being alone 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 an assembly 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!

Our assemblies do not mandate the presence of God. God is there before we get there.