

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

WORSHIP

“What Is Worship?”

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

“Give unto the Lord the glory due His name. Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness” (Ps. 29:2). Thank you for joining us today for our study of worship, which is a wonderful subject that teaches us how to give God glory and honor as we laud His greatness. Worship is one of the most important aspects of every Christian’s life. For example, the psalmist said in Psalm 95:6, “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.” Here, God has provided us with a definition of worship. Worship is when we “bow down to” or “kneel before” the Lord, Who is our Maker. God expects us to pay homage to Him, to give Him the glory, and to bow down before Him—which is the idea behind worship. Habakkuk 2:20 says, “The Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him.” I am reminded of Jesus’ words in John 4:24, where He said, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” Worship is a very important subject.

There is, however, an alarming danger that accompanies worship. Our worship can be in one of two extremes. If we are not careful, it can be solely entertainment based and man oriented. It can be similar to the circus acts that we see on television. Some people are so geared toward entertainment that worship ends up being like a three-ring circus. I am reminded of the story of one group who allegedly was worshiping God, and announced that they were “rapping with J.C. and the boys” (“J.C.” representing Jesus Christ). That is not what worship is all about. Worship is not entertainment. It is not supposed to be like a circus. Nor is it supposed to be about making us feel good or making us happy. Rather, worship is giving glory to God. So, on the one hand it is possible to have entertainment-based worship. But on the other hand, if we are not careful we can end up with another extreme wherein worship is conservative, but dead. It is scripturally true, but lifeless. Our worship must be according to the Bible, but it has to be biblical without being boring. It has to be doctrinal, yet not dead. We must worship God “in spirit and in truth,” which means that our whole being must be involved in worship.

Today we are going to notice some principles from John 4:24 that teach us about worship, and that teach us how important worship is to the child of God. In this verse Jesus said, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” One of the principles that we see from this verse is that worship is an **action**. By its very definition, worship is action. Worship is us paying honor to or glorifying God. The word worship comes from the Greek word *proskuneo* which means to “kiss the hand of” or to “bow down to.” In Matthew 4:10 we see an example of that. Jesus said, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.” Satan had just told Christ that he would give Him everything He could see if He would just bow down and worship him. But Jesus’ response was that only God was worthy of worship. From that idea we see that worship is “a bowing down” or “paying honor” to God. True worship always entails participation on the part of those doing the worshipping. To understand worship properly, we must understand that **we** are the participants in worship, and **God** is the audience. Have you ever heard

anyone say, “I didn’t get much out of that worship”? The question might be asked, “What did you put **into** your worship?” Worship is not supposed to be an experience like going to a movie theater where we can sit back in stadium-like seats and be entertained. Worship is something we **do**. God is the audience, and we are the participants. We do not worship as entertainment. That is not what worship is all about. So much of our society today revolves around entertainment, that we sometimes enter into worship thinking that it, too, is entertainment. Some people do not get anything out of their worship because they do not put anything into it. Worship is not about us; worship is about glorifying God in the way that He has commanded us. To understand worship properly, we must understand that there is action involved in worship, and that we must worship God the way He has told us to worship Him.

A second idea about worship that is found in John 4:24 is that worship must have the proper **aim**. What is the aim of our worship? Jesus said, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” The aim of worship is God. The Godhead (composed of God, the Holy Spirit, and Christ) is the only object of worship that is acceptable. As far back as the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-5) we learn that we are not to worship any other god because Jehovah is a jealous God. We are not to worship idols or graven images. That was true then, and it is true today. In Matthew 4, the devil tempted Jesus. He showed Jesus all the lands around Him, and said that he would give Jesus all those things if He would simply bow down and worship Satan. But Jesus said, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.” In John 9:31 the blind man spoke correctly when he said, “We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him.” We are to worship and give glory to God and to God alone. Hebrews 12:28-29 tells us that we are to worship Him “acceptably in reverence and in fear.” In Revelation 19:10 we see another example of this. John fell down before an angel, and the angel said, “See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!” The principle that we need to understand today is that the sole aim of our worship must be God Himself.

We also are to exclude certain things from our worship. For example, we never find biblical authority for worshiping departed saints—whether it be some great Christian of the past (like Paul, John, or Peter), or whether it be someone in our family whom we esteemed. The Bible never authorizes us to worship saints. In Acts 10:25-26 Peter, a prominent Jew, came to speak to Cornelius, who would become the first Gentile convert. Cornelius was so overwhelmed that he fell down and began to worship Peter. But Peter said, “Stand up; I myself am also a man.” There are a lot of people who hold up Peter (or Mary, Christ’s mother) as worthy of worship. But the Bible never authorizes that. Instead, it provides the example of Peter, as an inspired apostle, refusing the worship of men. We also must not worship angels. We live amidst what some have referred to as “angel mania”—where some people are so enamored of angels that they are willing to put them on a pedestal to worship them. But the Bible says in Hebrews 1:5-6 that Jesus, as the Son of God, is greater than angels, who are simply ministering spirits sent to minister to those who have received salvation. Thus, we do not find authority anywhere in the Bible to worship angels. In Revelation 19:10 the angel told John, “See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!” We also must not worship parents, and parents ought to never worship children. In Matthew 10:37 Jesus said, “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.” Parents must not put their children on a pedestal above God. Instead, they are to worship God in order to give Him the glory and honor. Children, likewise, are not to worship their parents. While it is fine to look up to parents and honor them as role models, God is the only One Who is deserving of our worship.

Another important aspect of worship found in John 4:24 is the **absolute** of Christian worship. Jesus said, "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." Worship is not an option. It is not something we can do "if we feel like it" or "if we are in the mood." Worship, for the child of God, is a "must"—an absolute. There is simply no getting around that. And, if we truly love the Lord, why would we **want** to avoid worshiping Him in the first place?! The word "must" modifies the action of worship. Throughout Scripture the word "must" is used to modify a variety of different commands. Here are some examples. "Having faith" is a "must." In Hebrews 11:6 we read, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God **must** believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." Can a person be saved without having faith? Jesus said that he could not. The same type of "must" applies to our worship as well. The command to be "born again" is also a "must." In John 3:3 Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Being born again is the only way a person can enter God's kingdom. The idea of being born again (that is, of being baptized) is an essential element of being saved. In Acts 9:6 we read, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you **must** do." What was it that Paul was told he "must do"? In Acts 22:16 Ananias said to him, "Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." So, there are several commands in Scripture that are modified by the word "must." Worship is one of those. The word "must" modifies the aim of our worship. We **must** worship only God. The word "must" also modifies our attitude. We **must** worship God in spirit and in truth by having our hearts, minds, and souls involved. And, we **must** recognize the authority of worship. "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit [the attitude] and truth [the authority]." Thus, God is the sole object of our worship, and we must worship Him with our whole being. We also must worship Him the way He has commanded us to worship Him.

Another important aspect that we find in John 4:24 is the **attitude** of Christian worship. Notice John 4:24 once again: "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." The idea is that our whole being must be involved. Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind" (Lk. 10:27). Our worship must include every fiber of our being. We must put everything we have into our worship of God. Here is what is different about New Testament worship. Such worship, by its very nature, is spiritual. In 1 Peter 2:5 we see that we are to offer up "spiritual sacrifices" unto God. Hebrews 10:22 tells us that we are to "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." How do we do that? We do it through our worship in spirit, according to the Word of God. Colossians 3:16 tells us to worship God "with grace in our hearts." Thus, the very nature of New Testament worship is spiritual. Our worship, of course, ought to be enthusiastic. It ought to never be dry, dull, or boring. If a person really loves God, and really is excited about serving Him as a faithful Christian, then that person will want to be enthusiastic in his or her worship. Singing ought to be enthusiastic, as 1 Corinthians 14:15 makes clear when it says, "I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding." "Singing with the spirit" means that we think about what we are singing, that we sing enthusiastically, that we realize the importance of what we are doing, and that we try our best through our singing to glorify God with our whole spirit. Giving ought to be enthusiastic, too. In 2 Corinthians 9:7 we learn that we are to give as we have "purposed in our heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver." Preaching also ought to be enthusiastic. Paul told Timothy, "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Timothy 4:2). Preaching ought to be something we are excited about doing. We ought to pray with enthusiasm as well. Daniel prayed with enthusiasm, as did Nehemiah and Ezra. In these men's prayers you could feel their enthusiasm and their desire to worship God in prayer.

The difference is that Christian worship springs from the heart. That is where our worship begins. It does not begin with an animal sacrifice or some kind of offering as in the Old Testament. Instead, it begins with the heart. Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19 teach us that we are to sing and make melody “in our hearts.” In 1 Corinthians 14:15 we learn that we are to “sing with the spirit.” We are to worship God acceptably (Heb. 12:28), which implies that there is a right way and a wrong way to worship God. But we also must realize that if our spirits are not engaged, then our worship will not be acceptable to God.

Additionally, our worship must never be like that of the Pharisees. In Matthew 15:7-9 Jesus rebuked the Pharisees by saying, “These people draw near to Me with their mouths, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” Not only had the Pharisees exalted the commandments of men above the doctrines of God, but their hearts were not where they needed to be, either. If their hearts had been in the proper place, they would have worshiped God as He had instructed. We, therefore, must never let our worship become lifeless, but must instead worship God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and being.

But there is another important aspect of worship—the **authority** of Christian worship. What is our authority for worship today? Can we simply do whatever feels good, or whatever we like or want? Or, there is a specific way in which God expects us to worship Him—according to a specific guideline? In John 4:24 Jesus said, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” If we want to worship God acceptably in order to be pleasing to Him, then we have to understand that we must worship God the way He has commanded. We cannot carry out our worship simply to make ourselves feel good or because a certain thing is popular. Worship always must be according to the commands of God. There is a standard in worship. The truth is our standard. What is truth? That same question was asked in John 18:36-38 when Pilate inquired, “What is truth?” Jesus had already said in John 17:17, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.” In John 8:32 He said, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” If we want our worship to be correct, then it is essential that we stick with the Bible. We must do exactly what God has told us to do. That is what it means to “do all in the name of the Lord.” In Colossians 3:17 we are told, “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” What does that mean? In Acts 4:7 Peter and John were put on trial, and were asked by what authority or name they had done what they had done. To do something “in the name of the Lord” means that we do it by His authority. The only authority that we have today is Jesus as the Son of God, and inspired Scripture. That is our authority. In Matthew 28:18 Jesus told His disciples, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” When Jesus said that “all authority” had been given to Him, that excluded anyone else from having authority in religious matters. The preacher does not have authority; the elders do not have authority; no religious leader anywhere has the authority from God, the Holy Spirit, or Jesus Christ to make up doctrines, laws, or practices in worship. Thus, we must worship God in the manner He has dictated. In 1 Peter 4:11 we are told to live and speak “as the oracles of God.” We walk today by faith, not by feelings (1 Cor. 5:7). How does a person walk by faith? Is it some sort of “leap into the dark” that allows a person to do as he wishes? No. “Walking by faith” means that we walk according to Scripture. Romans 10:17 tells us how we obtain faith: “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

Let me illustrate this for you by using an example from the Old Testament to crystallize in our minds exactly how important it is for us to follow exactly what God has commanded. In Leviticus we learn much about Old Testament worship. God had commanded the people to offer sacrifices, to burn incense, and to do many other things. He provided exacting

laws for the people regarding how they were to do those things. In Leviticus 10 we see two young priests—Nadab and Abihu—who decided to institute in their worship of God what we might consider a minor change. In verses 1 and 2 we learn that they “offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them.” As a result, fire devoured them, and they died in the presence of the camp. These two priests were offering incense, but they offered it by using “unauthorized fire.” They were still burning the incense, so someone might say, “What does it matter where the fire originated? That’s a minor thing.” But in God’s sight it was **not** minor—because He had not commanded them to do what they were doing in their worship of Him. If we today are going to worship God acceptably, we must do only what He has commanded. Man’s innovations, man’s inventions, and things that God has not commanded are no different than the strange fire that Nadab and Abihu offered in Leviticus 10. If we today do things that are not authorized by God in our worship of Him, our fate will be no better than that of Nadab and Abihu. We must not change or add to God’s Word. In Revelation 22:18-19 we are told not to add to or take away from God’s Word, but to do only what God has commanded.

But now let’s examine some of the **avenues** through which we can worship God. One of the avenues by which we worship God is through our singing. The Bible commands us to sing praises unto God. Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 are such passages. We are to “speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in our heart to the Lord.” Singing is one way that we worship God. In Acts 16:25 Paul and Silas were in a dark, dank, dirty dungeon. Yet in the middle of this, they were singing to God while the prisoners were listening. We are to sing praises to God—and that is **all** God has told us to do. We are to “make melody in our hearts” (Col. 3:16) and to “praise Him with the fruit of our lips” (Heb. 13:14-15). Another avenue by which we worship God acceptably is through prayer. In Acts 2:42 we read, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” When we pray to God to give Him glory, we afford Him great honor. Prayer ought not to always be a “Give us this” or “Give us that” session. If we look at the biblical prayers of people like Daniel, David, Ezekiel, Ezra, and Jeremiah, we see that their prayers usually began by praising and honoring God. Prayer is another avenue through which we can worship God.

Preaching the Gospel is yet another way by which God is glorified. From 1 Corinthians 1:21 we learn that God, “through the foolishness of the message preached,” chose to “save those who believe.” Preaching the Word of God, by its very nature (1 Pet. 4:11), gives God glory and honor. Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2, “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.” We need to give God the glory by preaching His Word. Stories, jokes, and things of that nature, including a “social Gospel,” do not honor God. God wants us to preach His Word. God told Jeremiah to preach what He had instructed him to preach. The same command applies to us today. We must speak and preach “as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11). Another avenue of worship is partaking of the Lord’s Supper. Christians are commanded to honor God through partaking of the Lord’s Supper. In Acts 20:7 we learn that “on the first day of the week the disciples came together to break bread.” In 1 Corinthians 11:22ff., we are taught that we are to remember the death of Christ until He comes. We are to think about His body and His blood. And when we do, we offer up our thoughts and actions as a memorial to Him. Jesus said that the bread and the fruit of the vine represented His body and blood. When we partake of those emblems, we give honor to Him. Another avenue of worship is giving. In 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 we are told that on the first day of every week we are to lay be in store as we have been prospered. In 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 we are told to give as we have purposed in our hearts, since God loves a cheerful giver. Thus, there are five acts of worship authorized in the New Testament—singing, praying, preaching, partaking of the

Lord's Supper, and giving. Those are the specific avenues Christians are instructed within the Word of God to use in order to ensure that they worship God "acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Heb. 12:28-29).

Why would anyone **not** want to worship God as He has instructed us to do? Think about all the things that God has done for us in this life. In James 1:17 we are told, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." God has given so many rich blessings in this life, including the gift of His Son. Jesus died on the cross for us. Think about the gift of the Bible. Think about the gift of the peace and joy we have when we know that we are right with God. How could anyone **not** want to give back to God by worshiping Him acceptably?

If you are not a Christian, you can become one today by obey the Gospel and giving your life to Him. If you are willing to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, repent of your sins, confess Christ's name as Savior, and be baptized in water, then you can become a child of God today. And, if you are already a Christian, but your worship of God has not been what it should be, our hope and prayer today is that this lesson will inspired your zeal so that you will want to worship God with reference and godly fear.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “WHAT IS WORSHIP?”

1. According to Psalm 95:6, what does the word “worship” mean?
2. According to John 4:24, what are the five characteristics of proper worship to God?
3. What are two extremes of worship that frequently are seen today in religion?
4. In proper, biblically based worship, who is the audience, and who is the participant?
5. Why is it that some people do not “get anything out of” worship to God?
6. Why is worship not intended merely to “make us feel good”?
7. Why, in Revelation 19:10, did the angel of the Lord refuse to accept John’s worship?
8. What does it mean for us to worship God “in spirit”?
9. What does it mean for us to worship God “in truth”?
10. According to John 12:48, what is the sole standard against which worship to God must be judged?
11. According to Jesus’ words in Matthew 4:10, whom are we to worship?
12. According to Hebrews 12:29, how are we to worship God?
13. In Acts 10:25-26, what did Peter refuse to receive from Cornelius?
14. Hebrews 10:22 tells us how to draw near to God in worship. What instructions do we find in that passage?
15. What is one of the five acts of worship authorized in the New Testament?
16. What is another of the five acts of worship authorized in the New Testament?
17. What is another of the five acts of worship authorized in the New Testament?
18. What is another of the five acts of worship authorized in the New Testament?
19. What is another of the five acts of worship authorized in the New Testament?
20. In Leviticus 10, what did Nadab and Abihu do that resulted in God’s wrath falling upon them?
21. How does Colossians 3:17 (“Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord”) affect our worship to God?
22. According to John 17:17, by what standard of truth must our worship to God be measured?