

# ***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, Timothy Sparks and Ben Bailey.

#### **Ben Bailey:**

“Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker“ (Ps. 95: 6). I’m Ben Bailey.

#### **Timothy Sparks:**

And I’m Timothy Sparks. Welcome to our study of worship. This message is being brought to you by loving, caring members of the churches of Christ. We want to invite you to visit the church of Christ in your area. You will be a welcome visitor, and will find people who genuinely love God and His Word. We are offering each of these broadcasts on the topic of worship on CD or DVD completely free of charge. If you would like a copy of this lesson or additional lessons that we have in this series or any other series, you may log on to our website at [www.thegospelofchrist.com](http://www.thegospelofchrist.com), fill out the request form you will find there, and we will be happy to send to you whatever you need. We also have available on our website streaming video and audio of these lessons, as well as a Bible correspondence course. We would like to help you in your study of God’s Word in any way that we can.

In our study of worship, we are going to be examining things that we need to know in order to properly and appropriately worship God.

#### **Ben Bailey:**

Worship is such an important action that we need to know how to carry it out according to the edicts of the Bible if we are going to glorify God. In John 4:24, Jesus sets before us some “absolutes”—things that we must know and do if we are going to worship God correctly. Jesus said, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” There are five characteristics of worship that are mentioned in this context. God is the **aim** of our worship. When we worship, our worship must be directed toward God. He is the sole aim of our worship. Then, there is the **action** of worship. Worship is not something we watch, or something we do through reading a book. Worship is an action on our part; we have to do something. There also is the **absolute** of worship. “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” There is also the **attitude** (or nature) of worship. It is spiritual in nature. It is not something that is related to geography, but rather the heart. Then there is the **authority** of our worship, which has to do with the truth of God’s will. When it comes to worship today, there appear to be two extremes. First, some worship based solely on entertainment. I recall one newspaper advertisement from a religious organization. The ad depicted a circus-type atmosphere, complete with a big tent, clowns, and balloons. At the bottom of the ad was the statement, “Come and see our minister kiss a pig!” Second, however, there is the opposite extreme where worship is totally lifeless and devoid of any feeling or emotion whatsoever.

### **Timothy Sparks:**

Unfortunately, some people believe that our worship must be emotionless—and that this is what pleases God. The truth of the matter is that in our worship, we must have a proper balance. Our heart must be engaged, and we must be sincere. We know from John 11:35 that, on occasion, even Jesus wept. Jesus had emotions, and He was not ashamed to display them. If we, for example, hear about Jesus' trial, His beating, and His crucifixion, and then we shed a tear, is there anything wrong with that? No, not at all. Both our heart and our intellect are engaged. As we worship, however, we need to be sure that first and foremost, our minds are not only involved but also in control. Some have said, "I wouldn't trade the feeling I have in my heart for a thousand Bibles." That is not the correct attitude, and it does not result in true worship of God. When we worship, we need to ensure that both our minds (intellects) and our hearts are properly engaged. Glorifying God is our **aim**.

### **Ben Bailey:**

Our worship must represent a proper **action**. We need to worship God in the manner in which the Bible directs us. But as we worship, we ought to do so with vibrancy and joy. We need to avoid the two extremes—solely entertaining or completely lifeless—and find a middle ground that strikes the proper balance—one where we are guided by the truth, yet one that permits our hearts and emotions to be involved as well. There are two problems that we frequently see occurring in worship. The first is that people do not get anything out of worship—for the simple reason that they do not put anything into it! If people simply sit there without any effort at participation, then, no, they will not get anything out of their worship—because they did not put anything into their worship. The second problem is that some people feel that they are the audience, and they must be catered to. In reality, it is exactly the opposite. We need to be prepared when we come to worship. We must come with the attitude that God is the audience, and **we** are to glorify **Him**.

### **Timothy Sparks:**

In this context, I am reminded of what President John F. Kennedy said many years ago. He said, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." In a similar fashion, we need to ask, not what **God** can do for **us**, but what **we** can do for **God**." We need to ask, "How can I worship (and serve) God with reverence and fear?" Sometimes we come to worship with the wrong attitude, and as a result we get very little if anything out of worship. We will get **out of** worship what we put **into** worship.

### **Ben Bailey:**

Let us ask the question, "What is worship?" The Bible depicts proper worship of God as an action. Worship is something we **do**. "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." The word "worship" means "to bow down toward or pay homage to." The idea is that when we approach a king or other type of dignitary, we bow down in reverence, we get on our hands and knees, and we pay homage to him as our superior. God is our King. He is our Creator. Worship to Him is our bowing down before Him to pay homage to Him. As the psalmist wrote, "Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker" (Ps. 95:6). So, yes, worship is an action on **our** part—not on God's part. God is the audience, and we are the participants—the ones doing the worshipping. We are not to simply sit in a worship assembly like the proverbial "bump on the log." Rather, we are to **do** something.

**Timothy Sparks:**

We are to engage our hearts and our minds as we participate in worshiping God. For example in such passages as Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19, we learn that we are to teach and admonish one another through our psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. God is the audience, and He is the one toward Whom our worship is to be directed. When people sit there “like a bump on a log,” then they are not participating. Thus, they are not worshiping as God has commanded them to worship. Still others, however, engage in vain worship. When we do not worship God as He has directed, then our worship becomes vain and fruitless.

**Ben Bailey:**

We need to recognize that we must **act** in order to worship God properly and to serve Him as He has directed. If we are in a worship assembly, but we are not singing, praying, giving, partaking of the Lord’s Supper, or actively involved in the message being presented, then we are offering vain worship to God—worship that is completely unacceptable to Him. Then, of course, there is the **aim** of our worship. “**God** is a spirit....” He is the one Whom we are to worship.

**Timothy Sparks:**

Because we know that God is a spirit, then we also know that He is not any type of physical image that is crafted and formed by human hands. God, as a spirit, is to be the aim, the focus, of our worship. We are not to direct our worship toward any physical object such as a cross or an idol. We are to direct our worship heavenward to God. For some, of course, this is not “concrete enough.” They want a grandfather-type image of an actual person or object to worship. But that is not the God of the Bible.

**Ben Bailey:**

When Jesus was tempted by Satan, he responded by saying, “It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve’” (Mt. 4:10). God is to be the object of our worship. If our worship has anything else as its aim or goal, then we have missed the mark of what worship is all about. Worship is not about making us feel good. Worship is not about merely “inspiring” those who are present (although if those who are present worship properly, they will be uplifted). In the Book of Revelation, when an angel appeared to the apostle John, John fell down at his feet and tried to worship him. But the angel responded by saying, “See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!” (Rev. 19:10). We are not to worship angels, objects, apostles, or anything or anyone else other than God. We are authorized in the Bible to worship God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit—as the three members of the Godhead. Our worship is intended to glorify Almighty God. Isaiah said that we were created “to glorify God” (Isa. 43:7). Paul said that whatever we do, we must “do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). God must be the center of our acts of worship.

**Timothy Sparks:**

In Ephesians 3:21, Paul wrote, “To Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.” It is to God that the glory of the church is to be directed. If we fail to honor God, then we have not been obedient to Him. We can be obedient only by coming to the Scriptures, seeing what they say, and obeying them. We have no right to

simply say to ourselves, “Well, I think that **this way** is a good way to worship God.” We must have a “thus saith the Lord” for whatever we do in regard to our worship of our heavenly Father. The Proverbs writer put it well when he said, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Prov. 14:12). It has been accurately said that “the road to Hell is paved with good intentions.” Good intentions by themselves will not get us to Heaven. We must abide by what the Scriptures say. When the Bible says, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth,” that is definitive! We do not have an option. If we are going to worship God, then we must do so “in spirit and in truth,” which includes both the proper attitude and the proper actions.

### **Ben Bailey:**

Jesus said, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” Notice that word “must.” In worship, there also exists an **absolute**. The aim of worship is God. The action is worship itself. The absolute is that worship of God is something that we **have** to do. This makes sense. God the Creator is our God. He made us. He is all-powerful and He is all-knowing. He has a right to require our worship. If our worship is directed at Him (and it is!), then He ought to be able to tell us how we are to worship Him properly. We, in turn, should want to worship God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. The absolute involved in our worship of God reminds us that this is not an option. Our worship of God is not something that we do “if we feel like it.” This is something that we should want to do because of our love for God and our appreciation of all that He has done for us. We should have the attitude of, “I want to serve and worship God. I want to give my very best to the Almighty!” While worship **is** an absolute, it ought not to **feel** like an absolute. It ought to be something that naturally flows from us to God out of appreciation for all that He has done for us.

### **Timothy Sparks:**

We should not think, “Well, I’ve ‘got’ to go worship.” That is the wrong attitude on our part. If we worship God with the attitude that what we are doing is tedious and wearisome, then we find ourselves at odds with what the apostle John taught in 1 John 5:3 when he wrote, “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments **are not burdensome**.” The apostle’s point is that God’s commandments are not things that should weigh us down. Rather, they should be things that we **want** to do. As Paul put it, “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” (Phil. 4:4). The question arises, of course, “If worship is an absolute, and God has said that we **must** do this, then how do we develop the attitude of **wanting** to do this?”

### **Ben Bailey:**

The answer, of course, has to do with priorities. We must get our priorities straight. If worshipping God—Who has given us all that we have, and Who has saved us from sin—is sheer drudgery, then it is time to stop and reevaluate what is truly important in your life. If God does not occupy first place, then He does not occupy any place at all! Jesus said, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Mt. 6:33). We, for our part, ought to **want** to worship God, and to put into our worship the energy, action, and dedication that God expects and deserves.

**Timothy Sparks:**

It is impossible for us as Christians to be people who truly know the Bible—and then to sit through worship like that “bump on the log” we mentioned earlier. We need to have the attitude of the ancient prophet Jeremiah who said, “Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart” (Jer. 15:16). When we have the Word of God in our hearts, we will want to worship God. Furthermore, that Word cannot be contained. We also will want to tell others about God. Jeremiah wrote of how he was weary of “holding back” the Word of God, and that he “could not” (Jer. 20:9). We need to have that same type of attitude, so that worshipping God and spreading His Word are joyous to us.

**Ben Bailey:**

In John 4:24 (“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth”), we also find the fourth characteristic of worship. This tells us about the nature or attitude of our worship toward God.

**Timothy Sparks:**

Worship is not a matter of geography. Our worship is not limited by our locality. Because God is spirit, He can be worshiped from anywhere in the world. We can worship God from inside a building—or from outside under a tree. Jesus and His disciples often prayed and worshiped in outside locales. In fact, just before His betrayal and crucifixion, Jesus prayed in a garden (the Garden of Gethsemane). We must never fall into the trap of thinking that our worship is confined to some sort of elaborately adorned building. Our worship must not revolve around a preacher or a building. Spiritual worship is what is under consideration in the latter part of John 4:24. When we learn to worship God properly as a spiritual being, then that will affect everything else we do in worship. For example, we will always approach God with the proper attitude and with the proper actions. And we will come to understand that our worship is not limited by time and place.

**Ben Bailey:**

Worship is spiritual by its very nature. God is a spirit. How do we worship Him? In spirit. Our worship must flow from our hearts—hearts that are trying to follow Almighty God. When we think about all that God has done for us, including giving His Son to die on the cross, we should be motivated to worship God according to His will and His Word. We should realize that “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights” (Jas. 1:17). We should be moved to worship God with zeal—with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. We do not have to focus our worship on a specific place, time, or building. Wherever God’s people are, they can worship God in spirit. And that worship can be done properly if it is done in accordance with what the Bible teaches. This, then, leads us to the last characteristic of worship found in John 4:24. We must worship God “in truth.” This provides the authority for worship. There are many people, it seems, who understand what it means to worship God “in spirit.” They comprehend the spiritual side of worship. Yet they fail to understand that worship directed toward God also must be “in truth.” It is as if one aspect (the spiritual side) is far out front, while the other aspect (the authority side) lags far behind. In reality, however, there needs to be a proper balance between spirit and truth.

### **Timothy Sparks:**

The heart and the mind must **both** engaged—but within proper spiritual confines. Jesus stressed the importance of truth when He said, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (Jn. 17:17). Worship must be in accordance with God’s Word. We must not have the attitude that was so prevalent during the days of the judges when “every man did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 17:6). We must do that which seems right in our own eyes. Jesus said, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (Jn. 8:32). The truth not only sets us free from sin, but also guides us in the direction in which we should worship God “in spirit **and in truth.**” The Word of God is truth, and it is the standard by which we will one day be judged (Jn. 12:48). The Word of God must determine what we do. We do not determine that; God does.

### **Ben Bailey:**

If people worship God in spirit by singing, praying, giving, etc., but they do not do so “in truth,” their worship is vain. The “spiritual side” of our worship to God can be right, but if worship as a whole is not guided by the truth of God’s Word, then our worship will be utterly worthless. God must be our aim. Our worship must represent an action on our part. We must recognize that worship has to be absolute. We must have the proper attitude. And, last but not least, our worship must be according to God’s Word (“in truth”). If it is not, then it will not be acceptable to God. We need to ask the same question that was asked in Jeremiah 37:17, “Is there any word from the Lord?” God has told us how we are to worship Him. We do not have to wonder about this matter. We can know beyond the shadow of a doubt how to worship God properly. If you are not a child of God today, you can become one by obeying His will. How can you uplift the name of God if you have never put on the name of Christ? You need to do what the Bible says to do to be saved. In Acts 2 we find people who believed that Jesus was the Son of God. They were willing to change their way of life based on that knowledge. Peter told them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). They heard the Word of God. They believed on Jesus as the Son of God. They repented of their sins. They confessed Christ as their Lord and Savior. And then they were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins.

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### **Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

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## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “WHAT IS WORSHIP”?

1. 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?
5. When we worship God, there are two “inner parts” of our make-up that must be engaged. What are those inner parts?
6. Worship is not a matter of geography; rather, it is a matter of something else. What is that “something else”?
7. In proper, biblically based worship, who is the audience, and who is the participant?
8. What is vain worship?
9. Why are we not to direct our worship toward any physical object such as a cross or an idol?
10. Why is it that some people do not “get anything out of” worship to God?
11. Why is worship not intended merely to “make us feel good”?
12. Why, in Revelation 19:10, did the angel of the Lord refuse to accept John’s worship?
13. According to Isaiah 43:7, what is one of the reasons that humans were created?
14. How does the teaching of Proverbs 14:12 (“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death”) factor into our worship of God?
15. According to 1 John 5:3, what are God’s commandments **not**?
16. What is involved in developing an attitude that **wants** to worship God?
17. When it comes to establishing priorities in our lives, if we do not put God in first place, what place does He then occupy?
18. What did Jeremiah mean when he wrote, “Your words were found, and I ate them” (Jer. 15:16)?
19. What does it mean for us to worship God “in spirit”?
20. What does it mean for us to worship God “in truth”?
21. What is the sole standard against which worship to God must be judged?
22. Why do we not have to “wonder” about how our worship to God should be carried out?