

John MacArthur

**TRUE
WORSHIP II**

Study Notes – Selected Scriptures

TRUE WORSHIP

Part 2

Introduction and Review

It's important for us to understand what the Bible teaches about worshipping God. We began our series by briefly looking at John 4:20-24 as the basic text (which we'll examine in more detail later on), and then by moving to a definition of worship. We defined worship as "honor, homage, reverence, adoration, praise, or respect given to God." In John 4:23b, our Lord instructs us to "*worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship Him.*" Worship, then, is giving respect or honor to God. It is to that end that we are called.

In our last lesson we discussed the following:

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF WORSHIP

A. Scripture Is Dominated With It

1. OLD TESTAMENT PASSAGES (see pp. 5-7)
 - a. **The Emphasis of the First Commandment**

 - b. **The Establishment of the Tabernacle**

 - c. **The Encampment around the Tabernacle**

 - d. **The Example of the Seraphim**

 - e. **The Exhortation of the Psalmist**

2. NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGES (see pp. 7-8)
 - a. **Romans 12:1-2**

 - b. **I Peter 2:5**

B. Destiny Is Determined By It

1. UNACCEPTABLE WORSHIP (see pp. 8-11)
 - a. **The Worship of False Gods**
 - 1) *Earthly/Material gods*
 - 2) *Heavenly/Supernatural gods*

Now, picking up where we left off last time, let's look at three more kinds of unacceptable worship:

b. **The Worship of the True God in a Wrong Form**

God will not accept the worship of a false god, nor will He accept the worship of the true God if offered in the wrong way. Why? Because the worship of the true God is very specifically established in Scripture, along with the proper mode and manner.

An illustration of worshipping the true God in a wrong form is found in Exodus 32. Moses was upon Mount Sinai receiving the Law from God. And while he was gone, the people, under Aaron's leadership, decided to gather all their gold together, melt it down, fashion it into a golden calf, and worship it. Now, they were not worshipping some other deity; the golden calf was their representation of Jehovah God. They reduced God to an image, and were worshipping Him in an unacceptable way.

When Moses returned from Mount Sinai and saw what was going on, he got so angry that he threw down the stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written, and shattered them (v. 19). Even God's wrath was so great that He threatened to destroy the entire generation (v. 10); but He was gracious (v. 14), and only 3,000 men lost their lives as they were executed on the spot (v. 28).

God will not accept worship offered to Him that is offered in an unacceptable manner. It's unacceptable to reduce God to an image, a material representation, an idol, or anything that is a result and product of one's own thinking. I often hear people say, "I worship God as I perceive Him to be." Well, if your definition of God doesn't square with the Word of God, your worship is unacceptable even though you may identify it with the true God.

Now, that leads me to a third kind of unacceptable worship:

c. **The Worship of the True God in a Self-Styled Manner**

Not only is it unacceptable to worship God by reducing Him to an idol or image, but it's also unacceptable to reduce the activity of worship to some personal definition. Let me show you what I mean by giving you a few scriptural illustrations of people who worshiped God in a self-styled way:

1) *Nadab and Abihu* (Lev. 10:1-2)

Aaron, the high priest, had two sons, Nadab and Abihu, who were entering the priesthood. Leviticus 10:1 records for us the great day of their ordination into the priesthood. This was their first actual day in which they were to lead the people in the worship of God. But look what happened: "*And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer [which, when filled with incense, was symbolic of worship, as its fragrance rose to the nostrils of God], and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He commanded them not. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.*"

It's very possible that Nadab and Abihu were drunk, because in verse 9 the Lord gave the following stern warning to Aaron, suggesting to us that his sons were drunk: "*Do not drink wine or strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die.*"

So, it may well have been that Nadab and Abihu got drunk, went into the Tabernacle, and began to fool around and do things that were not according to God's law for the priesthood – so God devoured them with fire! God will not accept self-styled, self-invented modes of worship. We are not to worship God on our own terms, we are to worship Him according to the terms prescribed in Scripture.

2) *Saul* (I Sam. 13:8-14a)

King Saul worshiped God in a self-styled manner in I Samuel 13. Starting in verse 8 we read:

"*And he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed; but Samuel came not to Gilgal, and the people were scattered from him. And Saul said, Bring here a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering.*"

"Now," you say, "is that any big deal?" It sure is! Nobody was allowed to function on the altar except for the priests. Saul wanted to put on a display of power and confidence before the people, so he intruded into the priestly office. Verse 10 continues: "*And it came to pass that, as soon as he had ceased offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might bless him. And Samuel said, What hast thou done? And Saul said, Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash, Therefore, said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the LORD; I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering. And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which He commanded thee; for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel forever. But now thy Kingdom shall not continue. The LORD hath sought Him a man after His own heart...."*

God will be worshiped only by someone who is after His own heart. In other words, someone who obeys God's Word. Because of Saul's self-styled worship, there would never again be anyone in Saul's line on the throne.

3) *Uzzah* (II Sam. 6:1-9)

Uzzah was a member of a group known as the Kohathites, who were responsible for transporting the ark of the covenant. The Kohathites were raised, from the time they were small, to know nothing but how to transport the ark; and according to Numbers 4:15, it was never to be touched. The ark had large rings on its side, through which the Kohathites slid poles and lifted them to their shoulders. This was always how the ark was to be transported and Uzzah knew that. He was trained from childhood to do it that way.... but he took the liberty of putting it on a cart. Now, that was his first mistake, because God will not be handled at the whim of man in a self-styled way no matter how good the intentions.

So, as the ark was being transported on a cart (which was in violation of the rules God had set down), verses 6-7 tell us: “*And when they came to Nacon’s threshing floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took **hold of it; for the oxen shook it [i.e., it looked like it was going to fall off the cart]. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error, and there he died by the ark of God.***”

You see, Uzzah knew better. He had been trained all his life to never touch the ark. But in his own way, he thought he could intrude into God’s commandments. The true God cannot be worshiped in a self-styled way!

4) *The Pharisees*

The Pharisees tried to worship the true God with their own self-styled system - not according to God’s commandments or standards, but according to their own inventions.

- a) Matthew 15:1-9 - “Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, who were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do Thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they wash not their hands when they **eat bread** [i.e., a traditional, ceremonial washing]. **But He answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?”**

You see, they told Jesus that He wasn’t worshiping according to their tradition, but Jesus told them that they weren’t worshiping according to God’s commands. They had invented their own system.

In verses 4-6, Jesus gave them an illustration of how their traditions violated God’s commands. Then in verses 7-9, He said, “Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth near unto **Me** with their mouth, and honoreth **Me** with their lips, but their heart is far from **Me**. But in vain do they worship **Me**, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”

God isn’t interested in all the holy hocus-pocus that goes on in so many “Christian” churches where the traditions of men have been substituted for the commandments of God. God is to be worshiped in spirit and in Truth – not through images, rituals, or liturgies.

- b) Matthew 23:23-28 – The Lord further indicted the Pharisees in the following passage: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy, and faith; these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, who strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. ... **For ye are like whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.**”

So, what I'm trying to show you is that there is a category of unacceptable worship. One cannot worship false gods, or the true God in a wrong form or in a self-styled manner. It must be according to the prescription of Scripture.

Now, the fourth kind of unacceptable worship is

d. The Worship of the True God with a Wrong Attitude

If we eliminate all false gods, all images of the true God, and all self-styled modes of worship, our worship will still be unacceptable if our heart attitude isn't right. This kind of unacceptable worship really hits us where we live. Very few of us worship a false god, or an image of the true God. And most of us don't invent our own ways to worship God. We try to worship according to Scripture. But a question each of us needs to ask ourself is this: Do I have the right attitude? If you don't, it's unacceptable to God!

Let me show you some passages which develop this truth:

1) *Malachi 1:6-14; 3:13-15; 4:1-6*

Malachi the prophet indicted the people of God because of their sin. In this marvelous prophecy he pointed out at least seven monumental sins of which they were guilty. But the one that stands out and dominates them all is that they were involved in worshipping God with the wrong attitude. They were just going through the motions, with their hearts far from God.

Let's look at Malachi's indictment. Starting in 1:6, we read, "*A son honoreth his father, and a servant his master; if, then, I be a father, where is Mine honor? And if I be a master, where is My fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise My name. And ye say, In what way have we despised Thy name? Ye offer polluted bread upon Mine altar; and ye say, In what way have we polluted Thee? In that ye say, The table [or 'altar'] of the LORD is contemptible.*"

Do you know what they were doing? They were treating their worship with contempt. It was strictly a function ... strictly a routine ... strictly a ritual. Not only was their heart not involved, but they were actually bringing to God that which was the least rather than that which was the best. But before we pounce on them with both feet, may I remind you that having contempt for worship is coming to worship with any kind of a wrong attitude ... any kind.

Now, what were they doing? Verse 8 tells us that they were offering the blind for sacrifice. In other words, they would bring blind animals to sacrifice because they were useless to them. A blind animal, since it would have difficulty finding food, would probably die anyway; so they would get rid of it by sacrificing it to God. In addition to that, the blindness might have been caused by disease; so they were offering God diseased animals as well. The worship that they offered to God was to just give Him what they couldn't use.

Verse 8 continues: "*And if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the LORD of hosts. And now, I pray you, beseech God that He will be gracious unto us. This hath been by your means; will He regard your persons? saith the LORD of hosts.*" In other words, "*If this is how you treat God, how do you think He's going to treat you? Do you think He's going to regard you any differently than you regard Him?*"

Then he says, in verse 10, "*Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nothing? Neither do ye kindle fire on Mine altar for nothing. I have no pleasure in you, saith the LORD of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand.*" There are some things that God won't accept: worship offered in a materialized way, in a self-styled way, and in a half-hearted way.

melody of thine harps. But let justice run down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream. Have ye offered unto Me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun, your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves. Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the LORD, whose name is The God of hosts."

In other words, God says, "I'm through with you! On the one hand you come and offer sacrifices to Me, but then you turn right around and worship false gods. You're so engrained, engulfed, and involved in the system of the world, that your worship is hypocritical and unacceptable.

3) *Hosea 6:4-7*

"O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? For your goodness is like a morning cloud, and like the early dew it goeth away. Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of My mouth; and thy judgments are as the light that goeth forth. For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. But they, like men, have transgressed the covenant; there have they dealt treacherously against Me."

4) *Isaiah 1:11-20*

Again God indicts Judah in a similar way to His indictment in Amos, only this time it's through the prophet Isaiah: *"To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me? saith the LORD; I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts, and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats."* In other words, God says, *"I've had it! I'm through!"*

Verse 12 continues: *"When ye come to appear before Me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread My courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto Me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot bear; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hateth; they are a trouble unto Me; I am weary of bearing them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide Mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land. But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword; for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it."* And they rebelled and refused the invitation to salvation.

The point is this: Whether it's in Malachi, Amos, Hosea, or Isaiah the people were doing the right thing, to the right God, in the right way, but with the wrong attitude ... and God doesn't accept that!

5) *Mark 7:6*

This is similar to what we looked at earlier in Matthew 15 (see pp. 16-17), but I want to look at it since I feel it wraps up this point:

"He [Jesus] answered and said unto them [the Pharisees], Well hath Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoreth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me." That is unacceptable worship.

If you worship false gods, or if you worship the true God reduced to some kind of image, or if you worship the true God in a self-styled, self-defined way, or if you worship the true God in the right way with the wrong attitude ... it's unacceptable and will affect your destiny. God cannot accept one who is unacceptable.

Now, that is the first kind of worship which determines one's destiny. Let me tell you about the second:

2. ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP

a. *The Picture of True Worshipers*

Psalm 24:3-6 gives a very significant definition of a true, acceptable worshiper: "*Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in His holy place [i.e., 'Who will He accept?']? He who hath clean hands, and a pure heart, who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. This is the generation of them who seek Him, who seek Thy face...*"

Those who are acceptable, true worshipers are the ones who have "*clean hands*" [i.e., they are obedient to God, purified, and made clean], "*a pure heart*" [i.e., their motives and desires are right], and who truly "*seek Him.*"

b. *The Production of True Worshipers*

1) *Synonymous with salvation*

Acceptable worship is really a key to understanding the whole matter of salvation. Why? Because **the goal of salvation is to produce acceptable, true worshipers.** If you're truly saved, you're a true, acceptable worshiper. Therefore, as you examine your worship, you're also examining your salvation.

Let me show you some passages to help you understand this:

- a) John 4:23 "*But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship Him.*" Notice the phrase "*true worshipers.*" That is a term to describe a Christian ... a saint ... a believer. We could be called "*true worshipers*" as easily as we could be called Christians, believers, saints, children of God, or any other term which describes our identity and union with Christ. Also notice, at the end of verse 23, that the Father seeks true worshipers to worship Him. Do you know why the Father sent the Son into the world? Well, in Luke 19:10 Jesus said, "*For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*" Why did God send Christ to seek sinners and save them? We just saw why at the end of verse 23: ... *for the Father seeketh such to worship Him.*" **The primary reason we're redeemed is to worship God ... not to make us happy.** If He wanted to keep us out of hell, He could have just not created us. But He created man and set out to redeem Him, because He seeks to be worshiped. So, worshiping God is synonymous with Christian existence ... with being a believer.

- b) Acts 18:7, 13 – "*And he [Paul] departed from there [Athens], and entered into a certain man's house, named Titus Justus, one who worshiped God ...*" The phrase "*one who worshiped God*" is just another way of saying he was a believer. A believer is one who worships God.

Further, in verse 13, the Jews attacked Paul and made the following accusation: "*This fellow persuadeth men to worship God.....*"

Do you know what Paul was doing in his ministry? He was persuading men to worship God ... which is synonymous with salvation. We're not to evangelize men primarily to keep them from hell, or to put them in the sphere of God's blessing. Primarily, we're to evangelize men so that they might worship God; showing them that to live apart from worshiping Him is an affront to His holy nature and a rebellious act in His world. **The heart and soul of evangelism is to call men to worship the God who is worthy of worship.**

How tragic it is for the Christian who understands that he is called and redeemed to worship God, to not worship God as fully as He ought.

c) Acts 24: 14a When Paul discussed with Felix his perspective on life, he said, *“But this I confess unto thee that, after the way [‘the way’ was another term for the Christian faith] which they call heresy, so worship the God of my fathers...”* So, not only did Paul call people to worship God, he included the fact that he worshiped God as part of his testimony.

2) *Supported by the Gospel record*

The Gospel record supports the fact that people are redeemed for the purpose of worship. In fact, what we find is that when people see the truth of Christ, they have an immediate response of worship giving honor, homage, respect, reverence, adoration, and praise to God Himself. For example:

a) Matthew 2:11a – *“And when they [the ‘wise men’ of verse 1] were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary, His mother, and fell down, and worshiped Him ...”* The first thing these king-makers did when they came into His presence was to fall down and worship Him. Why? Because that is the initial response to the reality of Christ.

b) Matthew 8:1-2 *“When He was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And, behold, there came a leper and worshiped Him, saying, Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.”* You see, the leper knew who Jesus was, so he responded in worship.

c) Matthew 9:18a – *“While He spoke these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshiped Him ...”*

d) Matthew 14:33 – After the disciples witnessed Jesus walking on the water and stilling a storm, verse 33 tells us, *“Then they that were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, Of a truth, Thou art the Son of God.”*

You see, whoever it is, whenever it is, wherever it is, the instantaneous, spontaneous response to Christ is worship.

e) Matthew 15:25 – *“Then came she [a woman of Canaan] and worshiped Him, saying, Lord, help me.”*

f) Matthew 28:9 – *“And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held Him by the feet, and worshiped Him.”*

g) Matthew 28:16-17a *“Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw Him, they worshiped Him ...”*

h) John 9:31 – Jesus healed a man who was born blind. When questioned by the Pharisees about Jesus, he said, *“Now we know that God heareth not sinners; but if any man be a worshiper of God, and doeth His will, him He heareth.”* This man makes an interesting contrast and says that there are only two kinds of people: those God hears, and those He doesn’t hear. The people He doesn’t hear are sinners, and the people He hears are worshipers. So the contrast is between sinners and worshipers. In fact, the whole world can be divided into “the sinners” and “the worshipers.” Therefore, to be saved means to be a worshiper.

3) *Seen in Israel’s calling*

When God called Israel out as a nation, He called them out for one express purpose:

They were called to worship. In fact, the reason for the Tabernacle, the Temple, and the priesthood was to cause the people to focus on worship.

In Deuteronomy 26:5-11, Moses, speaking to the Israelites who were to enter the Promised Land, said, *“And thou shalt speak and say before the LORD thy God, A Syrian ready to*

perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous. And the Egyptians badly treated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage; and when we cried unto the LORD God of our fathers, the LORD heard our voice, and looked on our affliction, and our labor, and our oppression. And the LORD brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with awe-inspiring terror, and with signs, and with wonders; and He hath given us this land, even a land that floweth with milk and honey.” Now, the Old Testament picture of redemption was deliverance from Egypt. Basically, then, verses 5-9 portray Israel’s redemption. Then in verses 10-11, we see the direct response to redemption – worship and rejoicing: *“And now, behold, I have brought the first fruits of the land, which Thou, O LORD, hast given me. And thou shalt set it before the LORD thy God, and worship before the LORD thy God. And thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the LORD thy God hath given unto thee, and unto thine house, thou, and the Levite, and the sojourner who is among you.”* So, worship (v. 10) arose from redemption (vv. 5-9), which resulted in rejoicing (v. 11).

4) *Stated by Paul*

In Ephesians 1:3, Paul says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” Now, that’s a statement of worship, isn’t it? And the reason for his statement of worship follows in verses 4-7: *“According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him, in love having predestinated us unto the adoption of sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, through which He hath made us accepted in the Beloved; in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”* You see, worship is the result of redemption.

Beloved, I submit to you that we’re called to worship. Without question, we are called to render acceptable, true, spiritual worship – not just sometimes or once a week..., it’s to be a way of life.

c. *The Perspective of True Worshipers*

We have been saved to worship. Look at Hebrews 12:28: *“Wherefore, receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved [i.e., the Eternal Kingdom], let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.”* The word “serve” is the Greek verb *latreuō*, and should be translated “worship.” In Hebrews 10:2, the noun form of *latreuō* is translated “worshippers.” Basically, then, the idea of verse 28 is as follows: *“Since we have received the Kingdom which cannot be moved, and since we have become worshippers of God, then let us have the graciousness to respond to God who has made us worshippers, by worshiping God acceptably.”* Put in Pauline terms, it comes out like this: *“... present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service [lit. ‘spiritual worship’]”* (Rom. 12:1).

Going back to Hebrews 12, notice verses 28b-29:

“... by which we may serve [lit. ‘worship’] God acceptably with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire.” In other words, we’d better worship God acceptably ... or else! Acceptable worship, first of all, is the result of salvation. But filling out that worship and living up to its fullness comes as a result of the graciousness of the believer who willingly offers his body in an act of spiritual service ... worshiping God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. And because God is a consuming fire, we need to be worried about the consequence if we don’t worship Him properly!

By way of application, if you have trouble and problems in your life, and you’re going through a checklist to determine why these things may be occurring, put at the top of that checklist: “Perhaps I’m not worshiping God with a true heart and a true spirit, and don’t have the grace to worship God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” If so, the consequences may be His chastening.