

John MacArthur

**TRUE
WORSHIP V**

Study Notes – Selected Scriptures

TRUE WORSHIP

Part 5

Introduction

I believe there's a very serious problem in the church today: Little emphasis is given to the matter of worship. Today's church doesn't focus itself on true worship. A.W. Tozer, of a past generation, said: "Worship is the missing jewel in the evangelical church." If that was true in his time, it is equally or more true in ours. America's twentieth-century church doesn't know how to worship. For this reason, we're looking at the subject of worship, and calling the people of God to commit themselves to acceptable, true, spiritual worship.

Review

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF WORSHIP

- A. **Scripture Is Dominated With It** (see pp. 5-8)
- B. **Destiny Is Determined By It** (see pp. 8-37)
- C. **Eternity And Redemptive History Are Described By It** (see pp. 38-40)
- D. **Christ Commanded It** (see p. 40)

II. THE SOURCE (BASIS) OF WORSHIP

- A. **The Response To Christ's Death** (see p. 43)
- B. **The Reason For Israel's Sacrifices** (see pp. 43-44)
- C. **The Revelation Of Isaiah's Prophecy** (see p. 44)
- D. **The Reaction Of A Converted Sinner** (see pp. 44-45)

In our last lesson we ended in the midst of discussing the third major point in our outline...

III. THE OBJECT OF WORSHIP

Who is it that we worship? It's not enough to just worship. The object of our worship must be clearly understood. There are people all over the world who worship... and have been throughout all of human history. They do not, however, worship the right object. Our Lord, in John 4, clearly instructed that there is only one object of worship. He said: "...*worship the Father*" (v. 21b), "...*worship the Father...*" (v.23b), and "...*worship Him . . .*" (v. 24b). So, we are to worship the Father. Also, in verse 24a, Jesus said, "*God is a Spirit . . .*" The One we are to worship, then, is defined to us in two terms: "*Spirit*" and "*Father.*" "*Spirit*" speaks of His essential nature, and "*Father*" speaks of His essential relationship.

A. God As Spirit (His Essential Nature)

1. THE SPIRITUALITY OF GOD

- a. **He cannot be reduced to an image** (see pp. 48-49)
- b. **He cannot be confined to a place** (see pp. 49-52)
 - 1) *Mt. Gerizim/Jerusalem* (see pp. 49-51)
 - 2) *The Tabernacle/Temple* (see pp. 51-52)

We left off last time discussing the misunderstanding that many people have in believing that God lived in and was confined to the Tabernacle, and later, to the

into His courts.” After all of this worship and praise, we come to a key statement in verse 9. Here is the attitude or perspective of worship: “Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness; fear before Him, all the earth.” **Holiness can never be perceived apart from fear.** Why? Because if you perceive God as utterly holy, you will in turn perceive yourself as utterly unholy. This will produce a sense of fear because a holy God has a right to a holy reaction against an unholy creation. So, the true spirit of worship is an overwhelming sense of unholiness in the presence of a holy God. Just so you don’t think the concept of worshipping God with holiness and fear is just an Old Testament concept, look at ...

- 2) *Hebrews 12:28b-29* — “. . . serve [or ‘worship’] God acceptably with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire.”
- 3) *Isaiah 6:1-8* — Isaiah went to the Temple to worship the Lord. King Uzziah had died after fifty-two years on the throne, and the Northern Kingdom was about to go into captivity as a judgment for their sin. Isaiah saw the demise of his people, and he sensed the problem in his nation, so he rushed into the presence of God to worship.

In verse 1, we find that he had a vision of God in which He was majestically lifted up and surrounded by seraphim — the guardians of God’s holiness. Two of the seraphims’ wings were used for service, and four of them were used for worship (v. 2). In verse 3, the seraphim were worshipping God and crying back and forth to each other, saying: “*Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory.*”

As Isaiah worshiped God, he perceived His holiness — holiness that causes God to react against sin — and he responded in verse 5: “*Then said I, Woe is me! For I am undone [i.e. disintegrating, falling apart, going to pieces], because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips . . .*” He was overwhelmed with his sinfulness. All he could see was his sin. Even though he had the cleanest mouth of all of them, when he saw himself as compared to God, he couldn’t see any goodness in himself. What caused this stark comparison? “. . . *for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.*”

Now, you may not have a vision like this, nor may I; but nonetheless, the lesson is true that when we enter into the presence of God, if we truly see God, we see Him as holy, holy, holy. We are then faced with a sense of our utter unholiness. If you have never worshiped God with a broken and contrite spirit, then you’ve never really worshiped God. That’s the proper response when entering the presence of a holy God.

Holiness inspires fear, and Isaiah was afraid. Why? Because he knew that a holy God had every right to react against an unholy sinner. He knew that God had every right to judge him and to take his life on the spot.

My heart is concerned that there’s a lot of flippancy going on in Christianity today, in entering into the presence of God. God has become so casual in our thinking — so human, so buddy-buddy — that we don’t understand the whole perspective of His utter holiness. We don’t understand that God is a consuming fire and that He has a holy indignance against sin. We must consider that if we flippantly rush into His presence with lives unattended to by repentance, confession, and cleansing by the Spirit, then we are vulnerable to that holy reaction. It is only by His grace that we breathe another breath, is it not? He has every reason to take our life! Why? “*For the wages of sin is death. . .*” (Rom. 6:23a). So, Isaiah had the only reaction that a true worshiper could ever have in true worship — humble, broken contrition.

lives. And if He does, He has every right to do so. You see, we get so used to mercy, that when God does what is just, we think He is unjust.

2) *His Justice Exemplified*

When somebody dies prematurely, people often say, “How could God let that happen?” When problems arise and life becomes difficult, people say, “How can God allow that to happen?” Well, the question is: How can God *not* allow those things to occur when we are sinful people? You see, we look at it backwards! Many people look at the Bible and ask: “What kind of God sends two bears out to tear up forty-two little children, just because they yelled, ‘Baldy, baldy,’ at the prophet Elisha (II Kgs. 2:23-24)? What kind of God slays two young men, Nadab and Abihu, on the day of their ordination, just because they got a little drunk and fooled around with the Temple incense (Lev. 10:1-2)? What kind of God slays a man who touches the ark to try to keep it from falling off a cart (II Sam 6:6-7)? What kind of God gives a man leprosy, when he’s been a faithful king for fifty-two years — just because he got a little proud (II Kgs. 15:1-5)? Why does God punish some and not others? Why did God slay Ananias and Sapphira (Ac. 5:1-10)? After all, they gave a gift to the Lord it just wasn’t what they said they’d give. Why did they have to die for that?”

Well, the question isn’t, for example: Why did Ananias and Sapphira die? The question is: Why didn’t *you* die when you failed to give the Lord something you promised Him? The question isn’t: Why did God take the life of someone who committed adultery? The question is: Why doesn’t God take the life of *everyone* who commits adultery? You see, it’s never a question of God being unjust, it’s only an issue of God being merciful. Sometimes, when He *does* do what is just, He does it as an illustration, or signpost, to remind men of His holiness, and to warn them of His judgment against sin (see I Cor. 10:5-12). So, as we look through Scripture and see the times when God acted in a holy way against unholiness, it shows us what God has a right to do. The question isn’t: How can God be so unjust? The question is: How can God be so merciful when His holiness is violated? That’s the issue!

I’ve heard people say, “Isn’t it awful that some Corinthian Christians actually died because they were coming to the Lord’s Table with a sinful life (I Cor. 11:27-32)?” Well, that’s not the issue. The issue is: Why are *we* still *alive* when *we’ve* come that way so many times? It’s only by His grace. People say, “Why did God turn Lot’s wife into a pillar of salt (Gen. 19:26)?” That isn’t the question. The question is: Why doesn’t He turn *us* into pillars of salt when we act in a similar worldly fashion and lust after the things of the flesh? You ask, “Why did He swallow up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram in the ground for being disobedient (Num. 16:23-33)?” That isn’t the question. The question is: Why doesn’t He swallow *us* up in the ground when we’re disobedient? We have to see things from the side of God’s holiness. God is gracious, but don’t let His grace sell short His holiness.

In Luke 13:1-5, some people came to Jesus and told Him about the Galileans who went into the Temple to offer sacrifices. While they were offering the blood of their sacrifices, Pilate’s men came in, sliced them up, and mingled their blood with the blood of the sacrifices. Then the people asked Jesus, “Why did God let that happen? Were they worse sinners than anybody else?” Jesus answered, “*I tell you, Nay. But, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish*” (v. 3). In other words, “You better get your lives straightened up, or the same thing could happen to you!”

Then the people said, “Well, why did God let that tower in Siloam fall over and kill eighteen victims? What did they do? Were they worse than anybody else?” Jesus answered, “*I tell you, Nay. But, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish*” (v.5).

You see, the question wasn't: Why did those Galileans get slaughtered? or Why did those eighteen people get crushed under a falling tower? Jesus showed them the real issue and said, "You had better get your life straightened up, or the same thing could happen to you."

This is all summed up in Hebrews 12:28b-29, which says that we must worship God "*acceptably with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire.*" This means that we are to live holy lives before God. We are to live lives of confession and repentance, so that our worship is pleasing and acceptable to God. And we must never go rushing into His presence to worship with unholiness in our lives, lest we receive our just deserts at His hand. While we are thankful for His grace, and we understand His love, we have somehow, in twentieth-century Christianity, missed His holiness — the heart of worship.

God is a living, eternal, glorious, holy, merciful Spirit —the object of our worship. And we must come to worship Him in the contrition, humility, and brokenness of sinners who see themselves against the backdrop of His utter holiness.

F.W. Faber, who has written so many beautiful words, wrote this hymn of praise:

"My God, how wonderful Thou art, Thy majesty how bright!
How beautiful Thy mercy-seat in depths of burning light!

How dread are Thine eternal years, O everlasting Lord!
By prostrate spirits, day and night, incessantly adored.

How wonderful, how beautiful the sight of Thee must be,
Thine endless wisdom, boundless power and awful purity!

O how I fear Thee, living God, with deepest, tenderest fears,
And worship Thee with trembling hope and penitential tears!

Yet I may love Thee too, O Lord, Almighty as Thou art,
For Thou hast stooped to ask of me the love of my poor heart.

No earthly father loves like Thee; no mother, e'er so mild,
Bears and forbears as Thou hast done with me, Thy sinful child."