

John MacArthur

**TRUE
WORSHIP VI**

Study Notes – Selected Scriptures

TRUE WORSHIP

Part 6

Introduction and Review

God seeks true worshipers who will worship Him in a manner which is acceptable to Him. We have seen that worship is the theme of history, stretching from Genesis through the end of Revelation. In the beginning, God created man to worship Him... but man rebelled. Since that rebellion, God has sought to bring man back to the point of true worship. That's the purpose for the redemptive plan.

Now, in order to understand worship, it is important that we have a definition. So, we began this series with a simple definition: **Worship is giving honor to God.** Next we looked at some key points which came out of that definition. First, we saw that worship is *giving* to God, not *getting* from Him. When we get together as God's redeemed people in the congregation of fellowship, we gather for the purpose of worship — not to receive, but to give to God. When a Jew in the old covenant went to worship, he didn't go to take something, he went to give an offering of money as well as a sacrifice. Everything was geared around giving to God.

We also noted, in our definition of worship, that it is in contrast to ministry. Ministry is that which flows *down* from God to us, but worship is that which flows *up* from us to God. They provide a beautiful balance. In the Old Testament, the prophet spoke the words which came down from God to men. But there was also a priest who spoke up to God on the behalf of men. Ministry and worship must always be held in balance.

Having given a definition, we looked at the first major point:

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF WORSHIP (see pp. 5-41)

The end of John 4:23 tells us why worship is so important. It's important because the Father seeks true worshipers. If God seeks true worshipers, then true worship is important. In fact, I'm convinced that as Christians, the primary reason for our existence is to worship God. It involves what we *are* (true worshipers) and what we are to *do* (truly worship). Worship is the very core of our existence as those who have been redeemed.

II. THE SOURCE (BASIS) OF WORSHIP (see pp. 42-45)

Again, in John 4:23, we see that the Father seeks true worshipers. The source of worship, then, is the efficacious, irresistible, redemptive seeking of the Father. God is drawing true worshipers into His Kingdom. We're redeemed to worship and are transformed into true worshipers. Perhaps the best definition of a Christian is found in Philippians 3:3 where it says that we are those "*who worship God in the spirit.*" Also, according to Hebrews 10:16-25, since Christ has redeemed us, since His sacrifice has perfected us, and since we have been brought into God's presence through a new and living way, our response is to "*draw near*" to God — to worship Him. We are redeemed to worship.

So, the *importance* of worship is seen in God seeking worshipers, and the *source* of worship is seen in God redeeming and saving us to that end. Thirdly ...

III. THE OBJECT OF WORSHIP

John 4:20-24 tells us to worship God. But specifically, in verses 21, 23, and 24, Jesus says to worship God as Spirit and as Father.

A. God As Spirit (His Essential Nature)

We've already discussed this point at length (see pp. 48-66), but before we continue, let me refresh your memory. God is Spirit, and as such, He cannot be confined to a building, a temple, a grove, or a mountain. In other words, God cannot be confined to a place (see pp. 49-52). Also, because God is Spirit, He cannot be reduced to an image made with hands out of wood, brass, gold, silver, or any other substance (see pp. 48-49). God is beyond being confined to a place or being reduced to an image, because He is an ever-living, ever-present, eternal Spirit pervading the full universe and on into endless eternity with His conscious presence.

Now, since God is Spirit, and is everywhere at all times, our worship of Him is to be a way of life. In Acts 17:28a, Paul said, “*For in Him we live, and move, and have our being.*” And since we move in the midst of His spiritual presence, worship is fitting and proper at all times. We don’t have to wait to walk into a church to worship; nor do we have to wait until our heads are bowed and our minds consciously drawn into God’s throne room. God is everywhere at all times, and is therefore to be worshiped everywhere at all times. This is the seeking Father’s desire, and can only be fulfilled by those of us who have been redeemed.

So, we worship God as the eternal, omnipresent Spirit... but we can’t stop there, because once in verse 21 and twice in verse 23, Jesus makes reference to worshipping “*the Father.*”

B. God As Father (His Essential Relationship)

I think most people have misunderstood this concept of God as Father here in John 4. Usually when we see the term *Father*, in reference to God, we immediately think of Him as our loving Father. Seeing the term in that way, Jesus would be saying, “Worship God as a vast, omnipresent, eternal Spirit, but also as an intimate, loving, personal Father.” Now, while it’s true that God is our loving Father and that we are His children, that isn’t what is being discussed in John 4. That is *not* the issue, nor is it the emphasis that Jesus is making. The emphasis here is

1. THE TRINITARIAN DESIGNATION OF GOD

God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He is three Persons in one – the Trinity. And it is in this Trinitarian sense that God is designated here as “*the Father.*” It is not primarily referring to us as His children, it is referring to His essential relationship within the Trinity.

Now watch this carefully: God is presented as the Father of the Son – and the Son is the Lord Jesus Christ. So when we worship God as Father, we’re not worshipping Him vaguely as the Father of all mankind (as the liberals might say), we’re worshipping Him as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. God cannot be worshiped apart from this designation.

a. Jesus’ usage of the term “Father”

In the New Testament, whenever God is discussed as Father, it is primarily as the Father of Jesus Christ. Every time that Jesus spoke to God, He addressed Him as Father ... except when sin separated Them on the cross (Mt. 27:46). You say, “What did Jesus mean when He referred to God as His Father?” I *don’t* believe that He was emphasizing His *submission*, as a son submits to his father; nor do I believe that He was emphasizing His *generation*, as a son descends from his father. I believe that He was emphasizing His sameness of essence, as a son is with his father. If Jesus is the Son and God is the Father, then They are the same essence. That is the heart and soul of the relationship that Jesus constantly expresses with the Father. He is emphasizing the sameness of essence, the oneness of nature. Therefore, **God can never be worshiped unless He is worshiped as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Let me give you some examples which show that when Jesus referred to God as His Father, He was stating His deity, His equality with God:

- 1) John 5:17-18 Jesus answered the Jews who were persecuting Him for healing someone on the sabbath, and said, “*My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.*” In other words, He calls the First Person of the Trinity His Father, and then says, “We work together.” Verse 18 then tells us how the Jews perceived His comment: “*Therefore, the Jews sought the more to kill Him, because He not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.*” They were right on target, because that’s exactly what Jesus was saying. Whenever Jesus called God His Father, He was speaking of Their equality of essence, of nature, of deity.

- 2) *John 10:29-33* – Jesus said, “My Father, who gave them to Me, is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father’s hand. I and My Father are one. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shown you from My Father; for which of those works do ye stone Me? The Jews answered Him, saying, For a good work we stone Thee not, but for blasphemy; and because that Thou, being a man, makest Thyself God.”

You see, when Jesus said that God was His Father, the Jews knew that Jesus was referring to His sameness of essence – His deity. They knew He was claiming to be equal with God.

- 3) *John 17:1-5* Jesus prayed to His Father and said, “Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee. As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him. And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent. I have glorified Thee on the earth; I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.”

Here, Jesus equates Himself with the Father, and then asks for the full glory that He had prior to the incarnation. He was equal with God, and His references to God as His Father were statements of His deity (cf. vv. 11, 21-25).

- 4) *Matthew 11:27* Jesus said, “All things are delivered unto Me by My Father, and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, except the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him.”

Here in this marvelous passage, the Lord again presents the unique, essential oneness of the Father and the Son. There is an intimacy of knowledge between the Father and the Son that is not available to human perception because They are one.

- 5) *John 14:6-11a* “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me. If ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also; and from henceforth ye know Him, and have seen Him. Philip saith unto Him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been such a long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of Myself; but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me ...” The Father and the Son are one.

So, going back to John 4, when Jesus calls God “Father,” it’s not *our* Father that He has in mind, it’s *His* Father. It’s a blatant, outright statement of His deity – His equality with God.

You say, “Why are you going through all of this, John?” Primarily because there are people who claim to worship God as the eternal, living Spirit who is everywhere present; and might even claim to worship Him as their Father. But if they deny that Jesus Christ is the same as God the Father in essence, their worship is unacceptable. No one can acceptably worship God as Spirit without also worshiping God as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. God cannot be defined or worshiped in any other terms. Anyone who denies the deity of Christ, yet claims to worship God, is a liar – because God and Christ are one.

b. The Apostles’ understanding of the term “Father”

Throughout the Epistles, God is worshiped and identified as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ:

- 1) *Ephesians 1:3a* Paul begins one of the great statements of glory offered to God (one sentence which extends from verse 3 to verse 14) by saying, “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ...* You see, that is how God is known.
- 2) *Ephesians 1:17a* – In Paul’s great prayer, he prays to “*the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory ...*”
- 3) *II Corinthians 1:3* Paul says, “*Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort.*”
- 4) *Philippians 2:9-11* “*Wherefore, God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God, the Father.*”
- 5) *Romans 15:6* “*That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” God cannot be worshiped apart from a recognition that Jesus Christ, His Son, is equal to God. That’s His deity.
- 6) *I Peter 1:3a* – Peter writes, “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ....*”
- 7) *II John 3* —John writes, “*Grace be with you, mercy, and peace from God, the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.*”

The point is this: God is not just a floating spirit in whom anybody can sort of plug into anywhere they want, with any particular form they want. God is eternal, vast, and ever-present – to be worshiped at all times, by all people. But the only way someone can come to God is to come to Him as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. That’s why Jesus had to say, “*...no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me*” (Jn. 14:6b). God can’t be worshiped apart from Jesus Christ.

2. THE TRINITARIAN WORSHIP OF GOD

a. *The Worship of the Son*

John 5:23 gives the logical conclusion to Jesus’ equality with God: “*That all men should honor [or ‘worship’] the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father, who hath sent Him.*” Did you get that? We’re not only to worship the Father, we’re also to worship the Son.

1) *Defined in the Unity of God*

Somebody once came to me and said . “I’ve been taught that it’s blasphemous to pray to anyone but the Father. Is that true?” I said, “No, that’s not true. It sounds like somebody has just gotten a little bit of knowledge, twisted a few scriptures, and is trying to pass himself off as a Bible teacher.” We can’t worship God the Father unless we worship the Son. We can’t even come before God the Father unless we come in the name of the Son. If we pray to the Father, we’re praying to the Son ... They’re one in the same. If we honor the Father, we’re honoring the Son. If we ask of the Father, we’re asking of the Son. If we praise the Father, we’re praising the Son. They come together – there’s no way to isolate Them. Therefore, without Jesus Christ, no one worships at all! We have every right to go to the Son ... to praise the Son ... to petition the Son, just as we would the Father. We’re called upon to worship the Son.

2) *Demonstrated in the Early Church*

From the earliest years of the church, Christ was recognized as Lord: He was confessed as Lord in baptism (e.g. Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:26-27), invoked as Lord in the Christian assembly (e.g. Eph. 3:10-12; II Tim. 1:2b), worshiped as Lord in anticipation of the day when every knee should bow (e.g. Rom. 14:8-12; Phil. 2:9-11), and petitioned as Lord in time of need (e.g. Heb. 4:14-16; I Jn. 5:14-15). The bottom line in all worship is that Jesus Christ is Lord – that’s fundamental.

We've talked, now, about the *importance* of worship, the *source* of worship (our redemption), and the object of worship (the Trinity). Let's look at a fourth point...

IV. THE SPHERE (PLACE) OF WORSHIP

In the Old Testament, the people of God clearly worshiped in temples, tabernacles, and very specific geographical locations. This is why the woman of Samaria, in John 4:20, said to Jesus, "*Our fathers worshiped in this mountain [Mt. Gerizimi]; and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.*" Basically, she was asking Jesus *where* she was supposed to worship. So Jesus answered her in verse 21: "*Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.*" In other words, Jesus told her that very soon, neither location would be the place of worship because they would both be eliminated.

A. The Symbolism Of The Old Covenant

When Jesus told the Samaritan woman that worship would no longer take place on Mount Gerizim or at Jerusalem, He was not denying the significance of the Tabernacle, or the Temple, or the ceremonial and sacrificial systems. He was not denying all the symbols, emblems, and pictures that God had given to His people. He was telling her that the time was coming when all the symbols would pass away, and that there wouldn't be a need for a physical Temple, sacrifices, and priests. Why? Because every individual believer would be a living temple and a living priest. Also, the sacrifice that Christ was to offer would be the one, full, final, permanent sacrifice – ending all other sacrifices.

Now there was nothing wrong with the symbols, but they were just that... symbols. God was never limited or confined to the Tabernacle or to the Temple, they were just prodders of the mind – symbols to cause His people to worship. But in the new covenant, the symbols became reality, and went from the external to the internal.

Jesus basically told the Samaritan woman that all the locations which were identified as the places of worship would, in just a short time, be eliminated. As you know, when Jesus died, the veil in the Temple was torn from top to bottom, enabling anybody to walk right into the holy of holies (Mk. 15:38). And in 70AD. the whole Temple was utterly destroyed. The Samaritan temple had already been destroyed in 125 B.C.. So, the whole system has come to an end.

You say, "Well, if there isn't a Temple, and there isn't a special physical building, where do we worship God?"

B. The Reality Of The New Covenant

1. THE TEMPLE OF OUR INDIVIDUAL BODIES

In I Corinthians 6:19a, Paul says, "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit...?"

As Christians, we are living temples of the Holy Spirit. You say, "Do you mean that I can worship God wherever I go?" That's right! You can worship Him at the beach, in the mountains, in the country, or in your living room; also while you're driving down the road, sitting under a tree, walking in the woods, sitting on your porch looking at stars, or smelling the fresh flowers in the morning. You can worship God anywhere you are, under any kind of circumstance or condition, because you are a living, breathing temple in which God dwells. In other words, *the sphere of worship is unlimited.*

You say, "Now does that mean I don't need to go to church?" Well, in one sense, that's true. You don't need to go to church to worship God. But we must look at another dimension.

2. THE TEMPLE OF OUR COLLECTIVE ASSEMBLY

There is a place of worship today – a building where God uniquely meets with His people. Let's look at this special building:

- a. **Ephesians 2:19-22** – Here in Ephesians 2, Paul describes the Christian in some very graphic terms. And he describes them collectively, not as disconnected, individual temples. First, he sees all of us as fellow citizens: “*Now, therefore, ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but fellow citizens with the saints...*” (v. 19a). Then he says we all belong to “*the household of God*” (v. 19b). In other words, we're family. Not only are we linked by common citizenship, and linked by common blood as family, but verses 20-22 tell us that we are linked together as a building: “*And we are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone, in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are built for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*”

God has a special building. Do you know what it is? It's the visible, living assembly of the redeemed saints. When we come together, we constitute the temple of God in a unique way. So, we are not only individual temples; collectively we are one great temple in which God dwells.

- b. **I Peter 2:5a** Peter says, “*Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house ...*” We are “*living stones,*” and when we come together we constitute a place of worship where God manifests Himself in ways unique to the assembly, that He cannot manifest Himself in when we are alone ...for He moves to us through others.
- c. **II Corinthians 6:16b** Paul says, “*For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them ...*” God moves in our midst when we come together.
- d. **I Corinthians 3:9b, 16-17** – At the end of verse 9, Paul says to the Corinthians, “*...ye are God's building.*” Then in verses 16-17, he says, “*Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him God shall destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.*”
- e. **Hebrews 10:24-25a** “*And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together ...*” Why are we to assemble together? Because in a marvelous, unique way, we become the living temple of God. We are not a building made with stone, we are a building made with living flesh.

Yes, we can worship God anyplace. We can worship Him all alone in isolation and privacy. But we must also worship God in the assembly of His redeemed people so that we can “*stimulate one another to love and good deeds*” (Heb. 10:24b NASB). We can't survive by ourselves. We need the collective assembly ...the living stones piled one upon the other which constitute the habitation of the living God.

So, worshiping God is not really a geographical issue, but that doesn't mean there's not a special building or a special place of worship. We must come together with God's redeemed people. We don't need special priests or special sacrifices, because we all are living priests, the sacrifice has been offered once for all, and we have immediate access to God on our own. We are His living temple.

When God instituted His worship to take place on the first day of the week, He did it so that we'd be faithful to it. If there's anything in your life that you need to be faithful to, it's the corporate worship on the Lord's Day. You'll not survive out in the world alone. Besides, to neglect the collective assembly of believers is to violate the command of God to not forsake “*the assembling of ourselves together*” (Heb. 10:25a). The stimulation and affirmation that

