

**John MacArthur**

**TRUE  
WORSHIP VII**

Study Notes – Selected Scriptures



1. SAMARITAN WORSHIP (spirit without truth) In John 4:22a, Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, “*Ye worship ye know not what.*” Now, what did He mean by that? Well, He acknowledged that the Samaritans were worshipping, they just didn’t know *what* they were worshipping. You see, the Samaritans only accepted the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) as coming from God. So their knowledge was limited. They had enough to know some of the truths about God, but not enough to have the full salvation revelation. They were worshipping, but they didn’t know the fullness of what they were worshipping.

Samaritan worship, then, was enthusiastic worship without proper information. Their worship was aggressive, enthusiastic, excited, and faithful, but they didn’t have the right content. In other words, they worshiped in spirit but not in truth.

Did you know that even though their temple was destroyed in 125 BC, Samaritan worship is still going on today? There are only about 400 Samaritans still alive, but if you were to go to Mount Gerizim on their holy days, you would see them slicing up animals exactly as it was done during the Mosaic economy. They’re still at it, and they will not give it up. They’re enthusiastic, but they don’t have the right information or content.

2. JEWISH WORSHIP (truth without spirit)

Back in John 4:22b, Jesus said, “*We [Jews] know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews.*” Now the Jews were just the opposite of the Samaritans. They accepted all thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and had the whole revelation of the teaching of salvation. They had the truth ... but they lacked the spirit. Just read Matthew 6:1-8 and you’ll see that they were cold, legalistic, and hypocritical. They went through the motions, but their hearts weren’t in it. Now I admit that there were some Jews who had a zeal for God, but the basic existing religion of Jerusalem was lifeless. They had the truth, but their hearts were empty.

So, Jerusalem had the truth without the spirit, and Mount Gerizim had the spirit without the truth. Those are the two extreme poles of worship. On the one hand is Mount Gerizim, or enthusiastic heresy. On the other hand is Jerusalem, or barren, lifeless orthodoxy. The Jews had all the accurate data, but they didn’t have any heart. The Samaritans had all the heart, but they didn’t have the data. What Jesus is saying is that both spirit and truth must be present in true worship. One without the other causes an imbalance. Sincere, enthusiastic, aggressive worship is great ... but it must be based on truth. Worship based on truth is essential ... but if it doesn’t issue in an eager, anxious, thrilled heart, it’s lacking. Often we can have light without heat, or heat without light, but true worship demands a balance.

## **B. The Discussion Of Worship In Spirit And Truth**

In John 4:23a, Jesus said, “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth ...” And then in verse 24b, He said, “... they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” Let’s look at these two elements of true worship:

1. WORSHIP IN SPIRIT

- a. *The Meaning*

Worshipping in spirit refers to the human spirit – the inner person. We are to worship from the inside out. It’s not a matter of being in the right place at the right time, with the right words, the right demeanor, the right clothes, the right formalities, the right activities, the right music, or the right mood. No! It is what’s on the inside – the spirit.

- 1) Romans 1:9 – Paul says, “*For God is my witness, whom I serve [Gk. latreuō ‘worship’] with my spirit.*” Paul worshiped God with his spirit.

- 2) Psalm 103:1 – David writes, “*Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name.*” David is talking, here, about glorifying God from within.
- 2) Psalm 51:15-17 – David comes to God with the worship of repentance and says, “*O Lord, open Thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise. For Thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it; Thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.*”

David acknowledged that God wasn’t interested in the external sacrifices, because they were just symbols of what God really wanted – the heart. And when he said, “... *open Thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise,*” do you know what that says to me? That pictures a man whose heart is filled with praise; but because of his circumstances and a lack of strength, he needs God to open his mouth so that the praise will come pouring out. That’s what it means to worship in spirit.

b. ***The Method***

How can we worship in spirit? How can we be so filled with praise that when our mouths are pried open it just gushes out? How can we keep from having cold hearts – bored and indifferent? Let me give you several principles on how to worship in spirit:

1) **Possession of the Holy Spirit**

Before we can worship God in our spirit, the Holy Spirit must be there to prompt it. According to I Corinthians 2:11b: “*Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.*” So if you don’t have the Spirit of God within you, prompting your heart, motivating your heart, cleansing your heart, and instructing your heart . . . worship isn’t going to happen. God cannot be worshiped without His Spirit energizing that worship. That’s basic. That’s the bottom line.

You have to be saved to worship God. Once you’re saved, the Holy Spirit comes to live in your heart to point you to God, to prod you, to poke you, to push you, to instruct you, and to purge you so that you can worship. That’s His ministry. It all begins with the resident Holy Spirit. We worship God in our human spirit because we are prompted by the Holy Spirit to do so.

In I Corinthians 12:3b it says that “*no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Spirit.*” In other words, a person can’t affirm the Lordship of Christ or worship Him as sovereign unless the Holy Spirit prods him. So, worship begins with the Spirit of God.

2) ***Thoughts Centered on God***

Worship is an overflow of a mind renewed by the truth of God. Contemplating God is the trigger that sets off worship. Now contemplating God, or thinking thoughts about Him, can be translated into the familiar word, *meditation*. True worship comes forth out of meditation. You say, “Well, what exactly is meditation?” To meditate is to focus your whole mind on one subject.

If you find it hard to focus your whole mind on one subject, it’s fairly normal ... especially in our distracting world. We are exposed to so many things through the media, that our minds are cluttered and our attention spans are very limited. But let me tell you something: The key to effective worship is to be able to concentrate your whole mind on one subject – to meditate on God.

### 3) *Discovery and Meditation on God's Word*

Meditation is based on information. If you're going to be thinking on one subject, you have to have a subject to think on. That's basic! The best, the purest, the truest, the most wonderful and blessed meditation, is based on what I like to call, *discovery*. In other words, when you discover a great truth about God, begin to meditate on that truth until it captivates every element of your whole thinking process. That meditation will give rise to worship.

You say, "Well, if worship is based on meditation, and meditation is based on discovery, what is discovery based on?" Discovery is based on time spent with God in prayer and in the Word. Sadly, we primarily see prayer as a way to get things, and we have lost sight of its communion element – living in the consciousness of God's wonderful presence and just communing with Him there.

### **‡ Do you get bored in church? ††††††††††††††††††**

If you get bored in church, may I suggest to you that it's not a commentary on the sermon ... it's a commentary on your heart! Even if the sermon isn't particularly worth listening to, for you to pick up some truths about God that come through, and then to meditate on them, should be the most exhilarating time of your life. If you're uninterested or indifferent, it's not a commentary on the sermon, its a commentary on you.

You see, if you go to church thinking, "I hope the preacher's got something to say that will get me into a worship mode," you've missed it. By the time Sunday rolls around, you should be so eager to worship with the assembly of believers, that you can hardly wait to get into the place to get started. Why? Because you should be in the process of meditating over what you discovered in the Word of God throughout the week. As you study the Word of God, commune with Him in prayer, discover truths about Him, and meditate on those truths, the joy of worship will appear.

C.H. Spurgeon said, "Why is it that some people are often in a place of worship and yet they are not holy ...? It is because they neglect their [prayer] closets. They love the wheat, but they do not grind it; they would have the corn, but they will not go forth into the fields to gather it; the fruit hangs upon the tree, but they will not pluck it; the water flows at their feet, but they will not stoop to drink of it." Worship isn't passive – it takes effort! ††††††††††††††††††

We've been rooted and grounded in Christ, but how deep our roots grow and how beautiful our fruit appears depends, to a large degree, on our process of discovery and meditation on God's wonderful truth. Now I know it's hard for us to meditate. It's difficult for us to isolate our minds on one subject. But it's a discipline – we have to train ourselves to be able to do it. I think about those guys who learn how to sit in the middle of the teeming mass of humanity in India and contemplate their navel for days at a time in an undistracted fashion, and I wonder why Christians can't think on God without being distracted.

Worship in the spirit, then, begins with the resident Holy Spirit. Secondly, our thoughts must be centered on God. Thirdly, we must be involved in discovery and meditation, which arise out of time spent in prayer and Bible study. May I make it simple? No discovery – no meditation; no meditation – no worship. If you go to church with a heart filled with discovery from your own study (or even if you've learned it from somebody else) and you've meditated on it and made it your own, you're going to find that when your mouth is pried open it will overflow with praise.

A fourth principle for worshipping in spirit is ...

### 4) *An Undivided Heart*

In Psalm 86:5-10, we see David worshiping and glorifying God for who He is and for what He's done: "*For Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all those who call upon Thee. Give ear, O LORD, unto my prayer, and attend to the voice of my supplications. In the day of my trouble I will call upon Thee; for Thou wilt answer me. Among the gods there is none like unto*

*Thee, O Lord; neither are there any works like unto Thy works. All nations whom Thou hast made shall come and worship before Thee, O Lord, and shall glorify Thy name. For Thou art great, and doest wondrous things; Thou art God alone.*”

David was pouring out his heart to God – extolling His wonders and His virtues. But his worship was hindered in two areas: he was lacking the truth and he was lacking an undivided heart. Look at verse 11: “*Teach me Thy way, O LORD; I will walk in Thy truth; unite my heart to fear Thy name.*”

First of all, David was lacking the thrill of discovery. Now, sometimes discovery isn’t discovering something you didn’t previously know; it can also refer to discovering something you knew before, and forgot; or discovering something you knew before and remembered, but never saw with such clarity. So, David asked the Lord to help him in his discovery process.

I would just like to suggest that when you find it difficult to worship, to meditate on God’s Word, to go through the process of discovery, or to let God touch your life with His Word to produce praise ... you need to stop and ask the Holy Spirit to be your teacher. He is the One who teaches us all things (I Jn. 2:27; cf. Jn. 16:13).

Secondly, at the end of verse 11, David said, “ ... *unite my heart to fear Thy name.*” The phrase “*fear Thy name*” was a euphemism for *worship*. In other words, David wanted to worship God, but he needed to have his heart united. What’s the opposite of a united heart? A divided heart. The first problem David had in worshipping God was that he didn’t have the truth he needed to meditate on. But secondly, he was distracted ... he had a divided heart.

We’ve all experienced a divided heart, haven’t we? Times where we sit down and say, “I’m going to pray now and spend some time with the Lord.” But no sooner do we get started, than our mind begins to flood with all sorts of distractions ... or the kids come blasting through the door at the moment of our greatest discovery! It’s so difficult for us to concentrate, and I imagine it was even more difficult for David. After all, he was a king, and he had a lot on his mind. Not only was he concerned about all that was going on in his kingdom, but there were many things in his personal life that weren’t right. So, he basically said, “God, I want to worship You; but I need an undivided heart to go along with the right instruction. I want to discover, and I want to be able to meditate without being distracted”

When you try to focus your spirit on worship, there will be one major hindrance – self. When you get in front of God, your worship will be hindered. You see, we often have things that we want to do to fulfill our own desires, so we don’t have time for discovery, or prayer, or meditation, or worship. And it’s hard to have an undivided heart because we’re always thinking about our projects, or our activities, or our needs. Self always gets in the way of worship. And we can’t really be free to worship God until we eliminate self altogether and become lost in worshipping God. It really comes down to the fact that we are just too lazy to make the effort. We’re so self-indulgent with ease, that we won’t expend ourselves to dig deep, to scoop up the water, to pluck the grain, as Spurgeon said.

One of the great experiences of my brief life has been to read Stephen Charnock’s book, *The Existence and Attributes of God*. It contains all of his thoughts about God – rich, profound insights – and takes an entire lifetime to digest. At one point, he says this: “To pretend homage to God and intend only the advantage to myself is rather to mock God than to worship Him. When we believe we ought to be satisfied rather than God glorified, we set God below ourselves, and imagine that He should submit His own honor to our advantage.” That’s the hindrance to worship – when we set ourselves and our needs, advantages, blessings, etc., above God.

Beloved, let’s be free to worship God. When we come together in the assembly of His redeemed people, may our lives be so filled with praise from time spent with God in prayer, study, discovery, and meditation, that when our mouths are opened, praise might burst forth, and our inner spirit offer true worship to Him.