

John MacArthur

**TRUE
WORSHIP VIII**

Study Notes – Selected Scriptures

TRUE WORSHIP

Part 8

Introduction

Recently, I have been greatly concerned about the matter of worship. So, wondering whether this concern was unique to my own era, I began reading the works of some of the more ancient scriptural commentators and saints of God. What I found out was that they too faced similar periods of time when the church had lost its perspective on worship. In fact, throughout church history there seemed to be a rather constant cry, calling the people of God to a worshipping life. For example, St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) said this: “Up, slight man. Flee for a little while thy occupations. Hide thyself for a time from thy disturbing thoughts. Pass away now thy toilsome cares, and put away thy burdensome business. Yield room for some little time with God and rest for a little time in Him, and through the inner chamber shut out all thoughts save those of God and such as can aid thee in seeking Him. ... Speak now to God saying, ‘I seek Thy face. Thy face, Lord, will I seek.’ ” And thus did he call his people to worship.

Review

In our look at worship, we’ve tried not to exhaust the theme, but rather to just touch the edges of it so that the Spirit of God might begin to teach us. So far, we’ve looked at a definition of worship (see p. 2), and we’ve discussed .

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

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

III. THE OBJECT OF WORSHIP (see pp. 48-75)

IV. THE SPHERE OF WORSHIP (see pp. 76-79)

In our last lesson we began a look at ...

V. THE NATURE OF WORSHIP (begins on p. 81)

A. The Deviations Of Worship In Spirit And Truth

1. SAMARITAN WORSHIP (spirit without truth)
2. JEWISH WORSHIP (truth without spirit)

B. The Discussion Of Worship In Spirit And Truth

1. WORSHIP IN SPIRIT

a. *The Meaning*

- 1) *Romans 1:9*
- 2) *Psalms 103:1*
- 3) *Psalms 51:15-17*

b. *The Method*

- 1) *Possession of the Holy Spirit*
- 2) *Thoughts Centered on God*
- 3) *Discovery and Meditation on God’s Word*
- 4) *An Undivided Heart*

Many times in the Old Testament God indicted His people for worshipping Him externally while their hearts were far from Him (Isa. 29:13; Jer. 3:10; Ezk. 33:31). In fact, the Lord indicted the religious people of His day for the same thing. For example, in Matthew 15:7-9a 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 they do worship Me....*” You see, God desires an undivided heart.

- a) Psalm 86:5-11 (see pp. 86-87)
- b) Psalm 108:1-3 – *“O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise ... Awake, psaltery and harp; I myself will awake early. I will praise Thee, O LORD, among the peoples; and I will sing praises unto Thee among the nations.”* In other words, the music of praise rises out of a fixed, undivided, settled heart – a heart focusing only on God.
- b) Psalm 112:7b-8a – This Psalm starts out, *“Praise ye the LORD ...”* and then continues as a Psalm of praise. How is it that the Psalmist’s heart can praise? Because *“his heart is fixed, trusting in the LORD”* (v. 7b), and because *“his heart is established”* (v. 8a). Praise, then, arises out of a heart that is fixed, established, and focused on the wonder of God.
- d) Psalm 57:7-11 – *“My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise. Awake up, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp. I myself will awake early. I will praise Thee, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing unto Thee among the nations. For Thy mercy is great unto the heavens, and Thy truth unto the clouds. Be Thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; let Thy glory be above all the earth.”*

So, to worship in spirit we must possess the Holy Spirit, our thoughts must be centered on God, we must be in the Word of God with discovery and meditation, and then we must also have an undivided and fixed heart. Fifthly, we must have ...

5) *An Open and Repentant Spirit*

In Psalm 139:23-24, David said, *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”* David was admitting, here, that he couldn’t fully understand his own heart. So he asked God to show him anything in his life that he needed to repent of.

As we approach God in worship, we need to come with an open and repentant spirit. We must come to God with a willingness to say, “God, turn on the searchlight and expose whatever You find in the corners.” If you have found it difficult to worship, and there’s little sense of the nearness of God, it may well be that there are areas in your life which you have long overlooked and are only known about by God. If that’s the case, you need to plead with Him to search those areas out and expose them to you. Then you need to willingly confess them in a broken and contrite spirit.

In order to worship, our sins must be dealt with. When Scripture talks about worship, it also talks about cleansing, purging, purifying, confessing, and repenting. Why? Because the only person who can utterly enter into communion with an utterly holy God, is one whose sin is utterly dealt with. **We can’t go rushing into God’s presence in our impurity, thinking that all is well!** We, like Isaiah, must confess our sin before God and allow Him to touch that live, burning coal to our lips to purge us (Isa. 6:6-7).

When the Spirit of God resides within us, when our minds are focused on God, when we’re in His Word discovering and meditating with an undivided heart, and when we have given God full access to uncover whatever stands between us and Him... that is worshipping in spirit.

Many years ago, Stephen Charnock wrote these words: “Without the heart it is no worship; it is a stage play; an acting a part without being that person really... a hypocrite ... We may truly be said to worship God – though we lack perfection; but we cannot be said to worship Him if we lack sincerity ... “That’s so true! **We may worship**

and glorified among His people. And as we come to Him in worship, He is glorified. The supreme purpose of life is to glorify God – and when we worship Him as He is to be worshiped, He is glorified.

Secondly, when we worship God as He desires to be worshiped..

B. Christians Are Purified

In Psalm 24:3-4, David said, “*Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who shall stand in His holy place? He who hath clean hands, and a pure heart. ...*” A worshiping church is a pure church. Why? Because as we enter into God’s presence there is a recognition of our sinfulness and a willingness to abandon that sinfulness. There is a consuming desire to be pure and clean, the closer we draw to God. And the nearer we come to Him, the more overwhelmed we become with our sinfulness, and cry with David, “*Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me ...*” (Ps. 139:23-24a).

The reason the Lord’s Table is so important in the worship of the church is because it causes us to regularly face the reality of our sinfulness. In fact, that’s the reason the early church so frequently engaged in it – so that they might come face to face with the need to be pure.

Where true worship occurs, not only is God glorified and Christians purified, but thirdly ...

C. The Church Is Edified

In Acts 2:47 we read that when the early church was worshiping, they not only found favor with God, but they also found favor with all the people. Then it says, “*And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.*” They filled the city with their doctrine (Ac. 5:28b) and turned the world upside down. They were winsome, attractive, and dynamic.

I believe that a worshiping church is a church that is built up ... edified. Now I’m not talking about people *feeling* better, I’m talking about people *living* better and becoming transformed. As we come together to worship the Lord, we become built up, strong, and transformed.

Let me say this another way: **True worship changes people.** If you’re not changed after you worship, you haven’t been worshiping. No one can draw nigh into the presence of God without changing ... it can’t be done! If worship doesn’t propel you into greater obedience, call it what you will, but it isn’t worship. It isn’t worship unless you come out of it with a greater commitment to obedience. As worship begins in holy expectancy, it ends in holy expectancy ... or it isn’t worship.

The results of worship are that God is glorified, Christians are purified, the church is edified, and fourthly ...

D. The Lost Are Evangelized

The profound testimony of a worshiping community probably has a greater impact than any single sermon does. In I Corinthians 14:23-25, Paul basically says to the Corinthian church, “If you’ll just get your worship shaped up and do it the way it ought to be done, the unbelievers that come into your midst will fall on their faces and worship God.” **Worshiping people have a great impact on the lost.**

I’ll never forget the Jewish lady who went to the temple down the street from our church to get counsel for her marriage which was breaking up. She hadn’t paid her temple dues, so they wouldn’t counsel her. Well, it happened to be on a Sunday, and as she left the temple, she got caught in the crowd coming to church and wound up in the worship service. I baptized her a few weeks later and she said to me, “I don’t remember anything you said that morning. In fact, I couldn’t even tell you what the sermon was about. But I was in awe of the joy, the peace, and the love that was going on among the people of the congregation as they worshiped. I had never seen anything like it before.” As a result of seeing worshiping people, she became a Christian.

So, the results of worship are that God is glorified, Christians are purified, the church is edified, and the lost are evangelized.

Now, some of you are saying to yourself, “John, I understand that the *importance* of worship is that God seeks worshipers; I understand that the *source* of worship is my salvation; I understand that the *object* of worship is God; I understand that the *sphere* of worship is everywhere at all times, especially in the corporate assembly of redeemed people; I understand that the *essence* or *nature* of worship is that it must be perfectly balanced between spirit and truth – the heart and the Word of God; and I understand the *results* of worship. What do I do now? How do I really prepare myself to worship?”

VII. THE PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP (Heb. 10:22)

When you go to church to worship, the issue is not how well prepared the choir or the preacher is ... the issue is: How well prepared are *you* to worship God? I believe that one verse, Hebrews 10:22, is the greatest summation of the preparation for worship anywhere in the Bible: “*Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.*”

A. The Call

“*Let us draw near...*”

This is a call to worship. Who are we to draw near to? God. The writer of Hebrews is saying, “Come on, it’s time to worship. Let’s draw near and move toward God.”

You say, “That’s what I want to do John, I want to draw near. But what do I do now?” Well, there are four checkpoints:

B. The Checkpoints

1. SINCERITY – “*...with a true heart ...*”

Are you really sincere? Is your heart fixed and undivided? Are you worshiping with your whole heart?

2. FIDELITY – “*... in full assurance of faith ...*”

The Hebrews, to whom this Epistle is addressed, were still trying to hold on to the old covenant. But because the new covenant had come in Jesus Christ, they had to say no to the old covenant in order to worship God. There were no more ceremonies, sacrifices, symbols, pictures, or types. The old was gone and a new and better covenant had come. So they had to be willing to say, “I’m coming to God in full confidence and assurance that I am no longer under a system of works or ceremony, but that I come fully by faith in Jesus Christ.” That’s fidelity.

So, not only are you to worship with sincerity, but you are to worship according to the truth as revealed in the New Testament, in full assurance that it is saving truth. You’re not to hang on to any of your own works, any of your own worthiness, any of your own self-righteousness, or any of your rituals. You’re to be fully assured that you can come to God simply and only through faith.

3. HUMILITY – “*... having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience.*”

We must come to God with the knowledge that we’re unworthy to be in His presence because our hearts are filled with an evil conscience. We must also realize that the only reason we can come to God is because we’ve been sprinkled by the blood of Jesus Christ which was shed for us on the cross, to take care of our sin and cleanse our evil heart. So as we worship, there’s a sense of humility and unworthiness – knowing that we have no business being in the presence of God, except for the fact that the Lord has sprinkled us clean from the evil that is in us.

So, to worship God you must pass the test of sincerity, fidelity, humility, and fourthly ...

4. PURITY – “*... and our bodies washed with pure water.*”

This is not the same as the cleansing of our heart at the cross, this is the daily washing. Before we can worship, we have to deal with the sin in our lives through confession. Even though our hearts were cleansed at the cross, our feet still pick up the dust of the world. So there must be a confessing of sin.

Every time you worship, prepare yourself by asking these questions: Am I sincere? Is my heart fixed? Is my whole heart devoted to God? Am I focusing on Him? Am I seeing Him in the Word, through discovery and meditation, so that my hungering desire is to draw nigh unto Him? Am I assured that I can come simply and only by faith, having the full assurance that it is sufficient? Am I coming to God with the knowledge that the only reason I am here is because of what Christ has done for me? And am I coming in purity –having dealt with any sin in my life?

I dare say that if you would just take a little extra time on Sunday mornings to open your Bible to Hebrews 10:22 and go through the checkpoints, you would do more to prepare your heart for worship than any other thing I know.

Are you sincere? Are you committed to the truth of the new covenant? Are you placing all of the rights to your access to God on the finished work of Christ? And are you pure – having dealt with the sin in your life? If you are, you can “*Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you*” (Js. 4:8a).

Some of you have been attending church for years, but you’ve never really drawn nigh unto God, nor have you ever sensed His nearness – even in your own private devotion and prayer. If that’s the case, your worship is probably being hindered by one of ...

VIII. THE BARRIERS OF WORSHIP

A. The Worship Of Repentance

If there is sin in your life, you have to accept the responsibility for it and confess it. In II Samuel 12 we find David after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba, after he had had her husband murdered, and after he had seen the child born of that union die. After all of that, verse 20a says, “*Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the LORD, and worshiped.*” That is the worship of repentance.

You say, “What do you mean by that?” Well, David was in the midst of a tragic situation – the loss of his baby son – and yet, he worshiped God. Why? Because he knew he was receiving what he deserved. In the midst of his chastening he worshiped. The worship of repentance means that even in the midst of chastening, you are able to pour out your heart to God, confess your sin, and say, “I’m getting what I deserve.”

Some of you can’t worship because you’ve never dealt with your sin and poured out your heart in repentance to God. You may even be angry or bitter over some of the things you’ve been chastened by. If that’s the situation with you, the barrier you have to first overcome is repentance over your sin. Secondly ...

B. The Worship Of Acceptance

In the familiar words of Job, when he heard the news that everything he loved was gone – his children, his possessions, his animals – the Bible says, “*Then Job arose, and tore his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshiped, and said, Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD*” (Job. 1:20-21). That is the worship of an unquestionable acceptance.

Some of you have never been able to worship God because you’re still unable to accept some of the circumstances God has brought into your life. They’ve made you bitter and you can’t worship. And until you get to the point of acceptance, you’re never going to be able to worship God.

George Mueller put it like this: “There came a day when I died; died to the praise and the

