

ACCEPTABLE INDIVIDUAL WORSHIP

Lesson 1

God Seeks Worshipers

John 4:19-24

Christians, who are spiritually mature in the 21st century, sense there is something missing in the evangelical church, especially in America. The trumpet gives an uncertain sound. Every conceivable explanation has been given to explain this missing link in Christendom. Some have suggested we need less tradition and more freedom of expression. Others have said we need more Bible teaching and less experience. Still others say we need less doctrine and more mystical experience in Christianity. May I humbly suggest that the missing link in modern day evangelicalism is Biblical worship, individually and collectively. Our evangelical churches may have sound preaching, good fellowship, sharp organization and myriad of activities, but they seem to have lost the ability to worship. The modern evangelical church is not cultivating the art of worship. A proper attitude of worship will give a balance between tradition and free forms of worship, and biblical knowledge and experience.

We must give deep thought and contemplation to the subject of worship, and if we have lost a spirit of worship, we must search for it until we find it. Why were we created? Did God create us to make a living, have a good time, and raise a family? Did He create us to be religious and go to church? Perhaps we think that God created us that we might serve Him. There is truth in this, for Christians do serve God and will serve Him through all eternity (Rev. 22:3). Service, however, is not the primary reason God created a human being. The first and basic reason God created a living soul was so that person could worship God. Service to God is always secondary to worship of the one, true and living God. The Presbyterians, who wrote the Westminster Shorter Catechism, were absolutely right when they said, "*Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.*" **"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God"**(1 Cor. 10:31). **"For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen"** (Rom. 11:36).

When most of us think of worship, we think of a Sunday morning worship service, but this is only a small part of worship. Worship is first and foremost individual and personal when a regenerated human spirit comes into contact with the living God as He is manifested in Christ Jesus, the Lord. Worship is knowing, loving, obeying and standing in awe of the sovereign, infinite, almighty God of the universe. Those who are personal worshippers of God will worship Him in all of life and gather together collectively to worship Him as an assembly of worshipers. Collective worship is important but it is only effective as each individual Christian has been worshipping God in his own daily experience.

GOD IS SEEKING WORSHIPERS - John 4:19-24

"'Sir' the woman said, 'I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we

must worship is in Jerusalem.’ Jesus declared, ‘Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth’” (John 4:19-24).

The clearest revelation about the true meaning of worship in the Bible is given to us in John 4:19-24 where Christ encounters the Samaritan woman by the well. The subject of worship only comes up at the end of the conversation with this woman because the main topic of discussion was her desperate need of salvation. We are told that Christ **“had to pass through Samaria” (4:4)**. Why? There was a sinful woman who had five husbands and was presently living with a man who was not her husband (4:17) and she was to be saved. Christ went through Samaria because it was a definite part of His plan to save this woman who deserved nothing from God but damnation. This was a unique encounter because Samaritans and Jews hated one another. Christ, the master-evangelist, got to know this woman before He witnessed to her. He met her where she was in life and asked her to do him a favor; that is, to give Him a drink of water. Christ broke through all of her prejudices and sins in order to bring her to a saving relationship with Himself. He pointed her to Himself as the one who quenches a person’s spiritual thirst for reality by giving that person eternal life and the forgiveness of sins.

It is significant that this woman was a Samaritan, and her ancestry was part of the ten tribes of Israel who broke from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Only Judah and Benjamin remained true to the revelation of God given originally to the twelve tribes of Israel. The apostate ten tribes set up a rival religion in Samaria to the religion of the Jews in Jerusalem. The Samaritans had their own priesthood, sacrificial system and temple that set on Mt. Gerizim. The woman said that her fathers worshiped on Mt. Gerizim, and, as a typical Samaritan, she slammed Jerusalem as the only place of worship (4:20). She, as all Jews and Samaritans, put her emphasis upon a *place* of worship, for no Jew or Samaritan could think of worship apart from a temple. For them, God was primarily located in a place, a temple.

True worship in the Old Testament came from the heart but it was limited because it was centered on the physical aids to worship—a literal temple, physical animal sacrifices, and a physical priesthood. A Jew and a Samaritan always thought of worship primarily in terms of a place.

Christ immediately corrected her thinking and said, **“Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem” (John 4:20)**. Christ made it clear that since He had come, worship would take on a new dimension. All the Old Testament physical kinds of worship were but types or shadows of Christ. The Old Testament kind of worship would pass off the scene and

something totally new, fresh and dynamic would replace this physical kind of worship. With the coming of Christ, the physical is replaced by the spiritual.

The Lord Jesus went on to tell this woman that the time is coming **“when true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth” (4:23)**. Real worship would not be going through outward forms, but will take on a new, dynamic, spiritual dimension that is inward. “Spirit and truth may mean: 1) Worship will be in freedom of the human spirit as it communes with the Father through Christ, and worship will also be bound up in truth; that is, the truth of God’s Holy Word and our response to it in truthfulness and honesty. Worship will spontaneously flow out from the inner recesses of a man’s spiritual being. This real form of worship frees a person from endless ritual and legalistic practices which kill the very spirit of Christ. 2) The “spirit” may refer to the Holy Spirit in His Pentecostal power, and “truth” refers to the truth of the gospel, with emphasis on the death, resurrection, ascension and return of Christ. This would make worship unique to the New Covenant age.

Then our Lord told the woman, **“For such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.”** The Heavenly Father is constantly seeking men and women who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. God wants Christians to shed the externals of physical worship and spiritually worship Him in spirit and in truth, which will result in, power and dynamic in the life.

Finally the Lord made a statement that staggers the human mind, **“God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24)**. In essence, Christ is saying that there is no real worship of God unless it is done in spirit and in truth. All of man’s externals and endless rituals are worthless if there is not worship in spirit and in truth. God is seeking these kinds of worshippers.

CREATED TO WORSHIP

God has a purpose behind every act He accomplishes. He never acts without intelligent design. God created man for a specific purpose. He originally created man that he might be a worshipper of the Most High God. God had no basic external or internal need for man’s worship and fellowship. God could have gone on for all eternity without man, for He is a self-sufficient God who does not need anything or anyone. Yet, God created man, so we conclude that God wants man to worship Him. Of all the created animals, only man has the capacity to worship the living God. While God does not need our worship, He wants it because we are His creatures and He is delighted when His creatures elevate, extol and exalt Him as the sovereign God.

Have you ever been to the place in your private devotional life in which you said, “I’m not getting a thing out of devotions. Why should I read my Bible and pray for I am not receiving a thing!” O, selfish man! Did it ever occur to you that God was enjoying your worship? That He delighted in your fellowship, and that you were pleasing God in these acts? You were created to worship God and God loves it when His people acknowledge their dependence on Him and give Him praise and adoration.

We are told that God in the original creation of Adam and Eve made man in His own image. **“And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen. 1:27).** This does not mean that God has a body like a human being, for the Bible tells us that God is spirit (John 4:23). It is not the material aspects of man but the immaterial aspects that are made in the image of God. God is a person and a person consists of will, mind and emotion, or as some say, volition, intellect and sensibility. God has a sovereign will, an infinite mind and a complete emotional make-up. When God created man, He created him also with will, mind and emotion. Why? So that man could rightly worship the one, true and living God. God gave man a mind so that he could know God. He gave him a will so he could obey God, and He gave man emotions so he could love God. Adam and Eve had a perfect worship of God. They were learning much about God and His purposes; they were obeying His commands and receiving great blessing, and they were loving God, entering into deep fellowship with Him.

Because God created within people the capacity for worship, all men worship. Every one, everywhere worships something. Worship is the fundamental drive of life. Atheists worship. Infidels worship. Skeptics worship. All people worship for worship is the basic difference between humans and animals. Animals do not worship. Why then do all people worship? God has set eternity in man’s heart as the Book of Ecclesiastes tells us. **“He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from the beginning to end” (Ecc. 3:11).** This urge from God causes men everywhere to worship. Deep within all of us is the cry for God. If people are not worshipping the true God, they are worshipping a god of their own imagination. Their god may be a stick or a stone, or money, power, sex and fame, or man, nature or Satan. Man will find something to worship because worship is a universal phenomenon.

SIN DESTROYS WORSHIP

No one knows how long Adam and Eve experienced perfect worship, but God gave them a free will under the sovereignty of God. Adam and Eve disobeyed God’s command not to eat of the forbidden fruit. They rebelled against God’s sovereign command and became sinners at enmity with God.

Adam and Eve’s natures became corrupted by sin, so that their minds were alienated from God, their wills were in rebellion to God and their emotions were estranged from God. The image of God in them had become deeply marred by sin but not completely destroyed. Because of sin, our original parents could not know God with their minds, love God with their emotions or obey God with their wills. Their capacity to worship God aright was lost. Perfect worship was marred by sin.

According to the Bible, this sin nature has passed from Adam and Eve to every member of the human race. As sinners, we cannot worship God rightly or perfectly. Yet, we know that the image of God is still stamped upon every created human being. Every

member of the human race has a corrupted image but not a destroyed image. Because of the sin nature, every person has a mind, a will and emotions, which operate but do so against the one, true and living God as He is manifested in Christ and revealed in Scripture.

This explains how it is that there is a natural instinct in all men to worship something. Man is a worshiping creature that distinguishes him from all the other animals. He was originally created to worship the true God but because of sin he is not able to do so even though there is enough of the image of God remaining in him, which allows him to be aware of his need to worship. Some people worship sticks and stones; others worship birds and creeping things. Still others worship men. Some worship spirits and demons. Some of God's creatures have more light and they worship an imperfect concept of God such as the Muslims, Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons and the modernistic Christian liberals. All men worship something but no man can worship the one, true and living God apart from divine revelation and divine intervention on the part of God because man is basically sinful. No created human being is by nature an atheist. For a man to become an atheist, he must be educated into this belief, which is also a form of humanistic religion and worship. All men, by God's image on their souls, are worshippers but sin has invaded their existence so they cannot worship God as they ought.

SALVATION IN CHRIST ENABLES RIGHT WORSHIP GOD

God sent His Son Jesus Christ into this world for the purpose of forgiving sin and granting eternal life so that a person can come alive to God and worship God. When a person trusts Christ as personal Lord and Savior, God begins to restore the marred image of God in man because of sin through the renewing process of the Holy Spirit. In the born again believer, God begins to enlighten the mind so the person can know God. God progressively frees the will so it can obey God, and He releases the emotions of a Christian so he can love God more. The Christian, and only the Christian, can worship the one, true and living God as He is manifested in Christ and revealed in Holy Scriptures. God's purpose, then, for sending His Son to die for sinners was that He might restore to us the ability to worship. As Christians, we can worship God aright but we will never worship Him perfectly, for we are still in this sinful body that is being progressively delivered from sin.

A.W. Tozer in his booklet, *Worship: The Missing Jewel of the Evangelical Church*, said:

“Now, God Almighty sent His Son Jesus Christ into the world for a purpose, and what was the purpose? To hear the average evangelist nowadays you'd think God sent Christ that we might give up tobacco; that Christ came into the world that we might escape hell; that He sent His Son into the world that when at last we get old and tired we might have some place to go. Now all of these things are true. Jesus Christ does save us from bad habits and He does redeem us from hell and He does prepare us a place in heaven but that is not the ultimate

purpose of redemption. The purpose of God in sending His Son to die and rise and live and be at the right hand of God the Father was that He might restore to us the missing jewel, the jewel of worship.”

Christians, God has saved you and is renewing your mind so you may know God. Are you using your mind to know more about God’s person and works? Are you studying the Bible so you will interact with God’s revelation about Himself? Are you grappling with doctrine so you can know God better and live a more consistent Christian life?

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16).

You are not truly worshiping God unless you are using your mind for His glory.

“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe” (Eph. 1:17-19).

John Stott in the book *Your Mind Matters* says,

“All Christian worship, public and private, should be an intelligent response to God’s self-revelation in His words and works recorded in Scripture.”

Martin Luther, seeing the importance of the Bible to one’s life, wrote:

“In truth you cannot read the Scripture too much;
And what you read, you cannot read too well.
And what you read well, you cannot too well understand;
And what you understand, you cannot too well teach;
And what you teach well, you cannot too well live.”

Christians, are you obeying God with your will? God is setting your will free that you may keep His commandments. You are not worshipping God unless you are desirous to keep God’s laws and precepts as they are revealed in Scripture. Obedience to God is basic if a Christian is to truly worship God.

“I have kept my feet from every evil path so that I might obey your word. I have not departed from your laws, for you yourself have taught me. How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path” (Psa. 119:101-104).

Christians, are you loving God with your emotions? God wants you to feel for Him as well as know and obey Him. **“Jesus replied, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind’” (Matt. 22:37).** God is renewing your sinful emotions so you might feel and experience the one, true and living God.

Worship, then, is about knowing God in an intimate, personal and dynamic way, which involves the mind, the will and the emotions. Are you experiencing God? Do you really know Him? Is the motivation of your heart to obey and please God? God is seeking true worshippers and He is always pleased when He finds them. The true worshipper can and will say,

“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Psa. 42:1-2).