



Introduction

From the very start of creation, men have worshipped God. Starting with Cain and Able there has been worship that pleases and worship that does not.

Much later in their history, Isaiah conveyed a startling message from Jehovah to the Children of Israel:

"These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men."

It seems that the Israelites were worshipping God outwardly with words and actions, but their worship was lacking the involvement of their heart. The rebuke should cause us to stop and question our own acts of worship. How should one worship God? What is it that makes worship pleasing to God? What does God find offensive?

This study will help answer those questions

God Wants to be Worshipped

Worship of God finds its roots in the first two commandments God gave to Moses.

³ "You shall have no other gods before me. ⁴ "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing love to a thousand of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Exodus 20:3-6

- In verse 3 God makes it clear that He is to be first. It is His first commandment.
- Underline the reason in verse 5 we are not to worship idols.
- Six times in the Old Testament, God describes himself as Jealous. It is always in relation to the worship of idols. He deserves to be worshipped and is deeply offended when worship is directed to anything but Him.

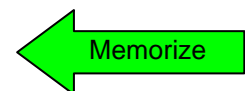
Idolatry became a snare for the Israelites. Although He made it clear that they were to worship and serve none but Him, they constantly and continually turned to idols. It was not until they were deported by the Babylonians that the worship of idols ceased.

Early Worship Practices

The book of Genesis is full of worship. Look at the following verses to see how the men of old worshipped God:

- > Cain (Genesis 4:3)
- > Able (Genesis 4:4)
- > Noah (Genesis 8:20)
- > Abraham (Genesis 12:8)
- > Abraham's Servant (Genesis 24:26-27)
- > Isaac (Genesis 26:24-25)
- > Jacob (Genesis 35:6-15)

The Genesis record is not meant as an example to be copied. Rather it provides the foundation for understanding the basics of worship. **In each case, worship was more than just words.**



Idolatry Defined

Idolatry is not limited to things made of wood or stone.

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

Colossians 3:5

In what way is greed and idolatry linked?

Observe the promise He makes to the children of Israel concerning worship directed toward him.

²⁵ *Worship the LORD your God, and his blessing will be on your food and water. I will take away sickness from among you, ²⁶and none will miscarry or be barren in your land. I will give you a full life span.*

Exodus 23:25-26

- Underline the action to be taken in order to obtain God's blessing.
- Circle each blessing which God promises.
- *Consider: God promises food, health, children and long life!*

God also spoke about the consequences of misdirected worship.

¹⁶ *Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. ¹⁷ Then the LORD's anger will burn against you, and he will shut the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the LORD is giving you.*

Deuteronomy 11:16-17

- Underline the action we are to be careful to avoid.
- Circle each resulting consequence of the worship of other gods.

How Should God be Worshipped?

Jesus revealed the essence of worship when He talked with the Samaritan woman in John Chapter 4. They had a relatively long discussion about worship. Jesus ended that discussion with the following statement:

²³ *Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth."*

John 4:23-24

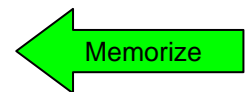
- In verse 23 underline how true worshippers will worship the Father.
- In verse 24 circle the two characteristics describing how a worshipper should worship.
- *To worship with the spirit requires the active involvement of the inner person. Outward display must be accompanied by an inner worship.*
- *Notice that God is seeking worshippers.*
- *Can you think of an instance where truth might not be present in worship?*

A Promise for You?

The promise made to the people of Israel 4000 years ago is as good today as it was then. The God who does not change is just as ready to bless you as he was ready to bless them. What condition does He place on the promise?

A Choice to be made

Given the consequences of worshipping God or worshipping other gods, why would anyone want to worship any other God?



Where to Worship?

Look carefully at the dialogue Jesus has with the woman of Samaria in John 4:20-22. Does it matter where one is located when worship takes place?

While the involvement of the inner man is essential to worship, we must be careful to include the physical side of worship as well.

⁶Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; ⁷for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.

Psalms 95:6-7

...

¹ Praise the LORD, all you servants of the LORD who minister by night in the house of the LORD. ² Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the LORD.

Psalms 134:1-2

...

... "Stand up and praise the LORD your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting." "Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise.

Nehemiah 9:5

- Circle the words describing the posture one might assume in worship.
- A physical position in one situation may not be appropriate in another situation. God can be worshipped whether one sits, stands, kneels or bows down.
- **Why do you think the Bible recommends so many different postures of worship?**

There is one other position of worship however that requires more thought.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship.

Romans 12:1

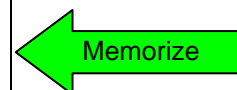
- Circle that which is to be offered as an act of worship.
- Underline why Paul was urging such worship.
- **Is the altar on which the living sacrifice is offered an actual physical place? Why or why not?**
- **In what way is offering your body as a living sacrifice an act of worship?**

Old Testament Worship

Worship in the Old Testament centered around the temple and animal sacrifice. Consider Joshua's words:

On the contrary, it is to be a witness between us and you and the generations that follow, that we will worship the LORD at his sanctuary with our burnt offerings, sacrifices and fellowship offerings...

Joshua 22:27



Here are some ideas on how to practice the concept of being a living sacrifice:

Luke 9:23

John 3:28-30

Philippians 3:10-14

Colossians 3:5

**The only problem
with a living sacrifice
is that it keeps crawling off the altar**

Some Cautions

To those who would seek to worship God with the heart, there are some cautions to be heeded and pitfalls to be avoided.

Consider Jesus' words in His Sermon on the Mount:

²³ "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

Matthew 5:23-24

- Underline the activity that should precede an act of worship (offering a gift at the altar).
- *If your brother has something against you, who is the one who has done the wrong? You or your brother? Circle the correct answer.*
- *Why do you think Jesus would ask you to make a relationship right before you participate in an act of worship?*

Not only are we instructed to have our relationships set aright before worship, we also must be on our guard against temptations to worship others.

⁹ "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

Matthew 4:9-10

- Circle the name of the person wanting to be worshipped.
- Underline the reason Jesus resisted the invitation.
- *Notice how Jesus used the word of God as a defense against Satan. This was scripture Jesus had memorized. He did not have a Bible with him at the time!*

Putting It into Practice

Based upon the verses in this study write a brief ending to each of the following sentences.

The most important ingredient in worship is

Those who worship God must

The greatest obstacle to my worship is

Making things Right

Compare Jesus' instruction in Matthew 18:15 with that contained in Matthew 5:23. Regardless of who has committed the wrong, identify the person responsible for taking the first step of correction.

Worship with the heart

For those just beginning the relationship of worship remember: It is not the beauty of the words or the lofty thoughts that please God. He is pleased when our hearts are engaged in the activity of worship. Words are only important when they express the desire of the heart.

So focus your heart on God and the words will take care of themselves.