

“WORSHIP – WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT ISN’T”
SELECTED SCRIPTURES

I. Introduction

In *John 4* Jesus spoke with a Samaritan women when she came to draw water at *Jacob’s* well. *Jesus* astonished her by telling her things that a stranger couldn’t possibly know.

***John 4:19-24**

¹⁹ *The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.*

²⁰ *“Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people (you Jews) say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.”*

²¹ *Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father.*

²² *“You worship that which you do not know; we (Jews) worship that which we (do) know, for salvation is from the Jews.*

²³ *“But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers.*

²⁴ *“God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and (in) truth.”*

In *Romans 1-11* the *Apostle Paul* puts forth the entire doctrine of salvation in the *Lord Jesus Christ*. He explains why the natural man is condemned, how he can be saved, how the newly saved man can grow in the grace and knowledge of God, and He reaffirms His OT promises to Israel and the Jewish people that will be fulfilled at the Second Coming.

Paul stands in amazement at what God has done, is doing now, and will do in the future. And he closes *Romans 11* with pure praise.

***Romans 11:33-36**

³³ *Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!*

³⁴ *For who has known the mind of the LORD, or who has become His counselor?*

³⁵ *Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again?*

³⁶ *For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To God be the glory forever. Amen.*

With the doctrinal portion of *Romans* complete, *Paul* tells us that, in light of the great things God has done for us, we have a responsibility to Him. What is it?

***Romans 12:1-2**

¹ *I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God which is your spiritual service of worship.*

² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

We've seen that we are to worship God in spirit and truth. Furthermore, we're told that such worship is not optional. It is, as *Paul* says, "...(*our*) spiritual service." Then he says that we are "...not (*to*) be conformed to this world, but (*to*) be transformed by the renewing of (*y*)our mind(s)."

The point is when it comes to our worship, we are not to worship the way the world worships. Rather, we are to worship God using the minds He gave when He saved us.

- Wouldn't you think the *Church of Jesus Christ* would know what God-honoring worship, true worship, worship in spirit and truth, is all about?
- Wouldn't you think the *Church of Jesus Christ* would receive both its inspiration and instruction about God-honoring worship from the Scriptures?
- Wouldn't you think the *Church of Jesus Christ* would be the one place where you would consistently witness the depth and breadth of God-honoring worship?

The answer to all three of those three questions should be, "*Yes, of course, where else?*" But there is a problem in the church today that shows no signs of improving. Much of the professing church no longer promotes or practices true God-honoring worship simply because much of the professing church no longer seems to know what it is.

As a culture we have become *self-centered*, *self-willed* and *self-exalting*. Such a culture does not worship God because such a culture cannot worship God! It just naturally worships itself. The Bible speaks about such people.

Isaiah 29:13

¹³ Then the LORD said, "Because this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote..."

Jesus quotes *Isaiah* in ***Matthew***.

Matthew 15:8-9

⁸ "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. ⁹ But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men."

Isaiah says, "tradition." *Jesus* says, "the precepts of men." Men's traditions and men's precepts – together they make for vain worship. Many churches today are fooling themselves into thinking that God is pleased with their worship. But is He really?

And if He isn't, why isn't He? The answer is simple. Our twenty-first century culture is far more interested in satisfying its felt needs and entertaining itself than it is in humbling itself and bowing down before the God of all creation. People say, "*We'll worship in a manner that pleases us. We'll worship in a manner that makes us feel good. We'll worship in a manner that makes us happy. In short, we will worship the way we want to!*"

And as such, they prove beyond any doubt, that they have no understanding of Who worship is really for, and Who receives the glory. Therefore, I want us to consider three things this morning.

- What *is* true God-honoring worship?
 - What *isn't* true God-honoring worship?
 - And I pray we will be honest with ourselves here – when it comes to worship, how are we doing here at Lighthouse Bible Church?
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II. Text

Listen please, God saved us on His terms. He expects us to worship Him on His terms. The primary point of all of this is that true worship is all about Him. It is not about us!

- The *foundation* of faith and worship is the *Holy Scriptures*, not our experiences.
- The *object* of faith and worship is the *Lord Jesus Christ*, not ourselves.
- The *goal* of faith and worship is our *personal holiness*, not our personal happiness.

It has been said that worship is a strategy by which we do away with our preoccupation with ourselves and focus on the presence of God. That's pretty good. And it makes perfect sense when you consider the meaning of the Greek words that are translated “*worship*” in the NT.

In **Romans 12:1** Paul uses the word “*latrēia*,” which means, “*divine sacrificial service.*” In **Hebrews 9:1, 6**, the writer uses the same word when referring to the Jewish priests’ service to God in the temple. Depending on your translation, the English word in these two verses is “*worship*,” “*ministry*,” or “*service.*” So “*latrēia*” tells us that our worship is to include *divine sacrificial service.* “*Latrēia*” is used no less than twenty-six times in the NT.

In **Matthew**, after *Satan’s* foolish attempt to have *Jesus* worship him, the Lord reminds the devil just whom he is to worship.

Matthew 4:10

¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, “*Begone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.’”*”

In **John 4 (woman at the well)** the word “*worship*” is translated from “*prōskunēō*,” meaning, “*to kiss; to bow down, even to prostrate oneself in homage; to revere and to adore.*” “*Serve*” here in **John 4** comes from “*latrēia*,” but “*worship*” comes from “*prōskunēō*.” “*Prōskunēō*,” is used sixty times in the NT. (*By the way, there are twelve other Greek words translated “worship” in the NT. Many of them relate to the fear of God.*) Worship and serve!

Near the end of **Revelation** the church is given words of comfort and blessing. The *Apostle John* is so overwhelmed by God’s magnificent promises that he falls prostrate at the feet of the angel who has brought him God’s words.

***Revelation 22:6-9**

⁶ And he (*the angel*) said to me, “*These words are faithful and true*”;

and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bondservants the things which must shortly take place.

⁷ “And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book.”

⁸ And I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things.

⁹ And he said to me, “Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book; worship God.”

So we worship God and God alone. We humble ourselves. We see ourselves for who and what we are. We see God for Who and what He is. And when we see clearly, we fall at His feet. And then we give ourselves over to Him for *divine sacrificial service*. And in the process, He makes us like His Son, He sanctifies us, and He makes us holy.

Is that what your worship is like? Is that what my worship is like? Is that what our worship service is like? That’s what it’s *supposed* to be like. We’re not here to satisfy and entertain ourselves. We’re not here to worship in a manner that makes us feel good, or that pleases us, or that makes us happy. We *are* here to present ourselves for service and to offer ourselves to God for His good pleasure.

Now hear me, please. Our very holiness, your holiness and mine, is inextricably linked to our worship.

A few years ago *John* and I attended the Moody Pastor’s Conference in Chicago. *Ginny* and *Laurie* joined us for the final evening service. After nearly forty minutes of standing and singing and clapping and swaying back and forth to “*praise music*” led by a “*worship team*,” *John MacArthur* got up to deliver the conference’s final message.

His main point that evening was that pastors have one job. That job is to shepherd the flock of God. Period! *MacArthur* referred to **John 21** where *Jesus* restored *Peter* and prepared him for his coming ministry. *Jesus* told *Peter* to, “*Tend My sheep, shepherd My sheep, and feed My sheep.*” (**John 21:15-17**)

MacArthur said that contrary to popular opinion, the pastor’s task *is not* to evangelize the lost or to engage the surrounding culture. Rather, the pastor’s job *is* to care for God’s sheep. In **1 Peter 5:2** the apostle tells pastors that they are called to “...*shepherd the flock of God among you*...”

Pastors are called to protect, to feed, and to sanctify the flock. In **Ephesians** *Paul* speaks about the spiritual gifts given to the church, to the flock of God.

Ephesians 4:11-13

¹¹ And (God) gave some as apostles, and some as prophets (the past), and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers (the present),

¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

“Building up” in v. 12 doesn’t mean *quantity*, it means *quality*. It doesn’t mean *breadth*, it means *depth*. It is about the church being a sanctuary for the saints who are being sanctified and made holy.

Those four words – *saint*, *sanctify*, *sanctuary*, and *holy* – all come from the very same Greek word. (“*hagios*” and its many variants) Therefore, those four words – *saint*, *sanctify*, *sanctuary*, and *holy* – cannot be separated. They all revolve around the beauty and purity of God-honoring worship.

Back to *MacArthur* for a moment. Near the conclusion of his sermon at Moody a few years ago, he made the point that the pastor/teacher must teach sound doctrine and stand against every form of ungodliness and any remnant of satanic deception. This is how the saints are made holy. Such holiness has nothing whatsoever to do with feelings and emotions. Then referring to the kind of music that has taken over in so many churches, he said this. “*You can sway and sing till you’re purple, but that’s not going to sanctify you.*”

The fact is that a great deal of what is considered Christian worship today is wrapped up in music. We know that music is capable of eliciting strong emotions. But good Christian music must appeal to the intellect. Much of today’s so-called “worship” music is often called “seven-eleven” music. (*You know what that is – seven words eleven times.*) Such music focuses too much on the emotions and too little on the intellect.

That’s why we strive to make our music here at Lighthouse, as is stated in our Philosophy of Music, “*sound in doctrine, substantive in message, and edifying to the soul.*” But when Christians respond to the music at their churches in a similar manner to the way the world responds at a rock concert, then there is a problem with both the music and the teaching. They’re missing the point and exhibiting a low view of what worship really is.

Shallow repetitive music that’s primarily designed to excite the crowd or stimulate the emotions has no place in true God-honoring worship. Furthermore, I am convinced that there is a demonstrable correlation between churches that are abandoning their hymnals and the great hymns of the faith, and the richness of worship that’s been a hallmark of Christianity for generations.

Here’s a point of application that may be helpful to you. If I were to take a survey and ask you two questions about your spiritual life, I suspect most of you would have to offer the same answers.

- Are you satisfied with your personal prayer life? Or has it become dull, repetitive, and concerned mostly with people’s physical health and well-being?

- Are you frustrated with your personal worship of God? Is “*Thank You, Lord,*” and “*Praise God*” about the best you can do?

Let me suggest a few things. *First*, you already have a Bible. When you go to prayer open your Bible to *Psalms*. Pay particular attention to those verses that pour out honor and praise and glory to God. You may not have the words you want, but the Bible does!

Second, take a hymnal home with you. (*Just remember to bring it back.*) I have found the hymnal to be a wonderful aid to prayer. Here are a few examples...

- Would you like to praise and worship God for His *power* and *greatness*? Then read hymn #128, “*I Sing the Mighty Power of God*” from *Exodus 20:11*.
- Do you want to praise God and worship Him for His *faithfulness* and *compassion*? Read hymn #139, “*Great Is Thy Faithfulness*” from *Lamentations 3:22-23*.
- Might you offer up praise and worship to God for His marvelous *attributes*? Read hymn, #33, “*Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise*” from *1 Timothy 1:17*.
- Or what about hymn #45 (*which we will sing in a few minutes*), “*Crown Him with Many Crowns*” inspired by *Revelation 19:12*

See what I mean? There is no meaningless repetition, nothing *self-centered*, *self-willed*, or *self-exalting* in the great hymns of the faith. Our hymnal can help lift you to heights of true God-honoring worship. *A.W. Tozer*, one of the great Christian intellects of the last century, routinely used his hymnal as an aid to his own personal prayer and worship time.

Ginny and I have begun to do that and we can testify that it is worth your time. But a word of caution is necessary here. Even in our hymnal you will need to exercise your God-given gifts of wisdom and discernment. Sadly, some editors are changing the words of certain hymns to soften the impact of the original words. Even godly Christians are infected with the world’s desire to “*pretty things up.*” Today, tragically, biblical reality is too much even for many professing Christians. Here is just one example.

Isaac Watts, the prolific eighteenth century hymn writer, originally penned these words. Consider “*At the Cross.*” Here are *Isaac Watts’* words from the early 1700s. They are so rendered in a hymnal published in 1968. “*Alas! And did my Savior bleed, and did my sovereign die? Would He devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?*” Are you and I worms? Well, compared to the holiness of God, yes, we are. *Isaac Watts’* words reflect his own personal humility when contrasted with his knowledge of God’s greatness.

Our hymnal was published a mere twenty-nine years later, in 1997. It says, “*Alas! And did my Savior bleed, and did my sovereign die? Would He devote that sacred head for sinners such as I?*” Softer, right? After all, we don’t want to call ourselves worms. But it’s still all right to call ourselves sinners... isn’t it? Well, maybe not. It seems that some of the newest hymnals have softened it once again. Some, who still sing “*At the Cross,*” now say “*Alas! And did my Savior bleed, and did my sovereign die? Would He devote that sacred head for someone such as I?*” (*from worm to sinner to someone*)

Listen, we will never fully appreciate the holiness, the grace, and the awesome beauty of God as long as we think we're not so bad.

Today there are still some who write like *Isaac Watts* wrote back in the 1700s. Among the most notable examples are *Keith and Kristyn Getty* and *Stuart Townend*. Their works include "God of Grace," "In Christ Alone," and "Speak, O Lord." In the last few years we've incorporated all of those into our worship service.

But new music of that caliber is hard to come by. Why is that? Is man more holy today than he was 300 years ago? I don't think so! Softening of the truth is going on all around us. And today much of what is called Christian music is one of the primary culprits.

For 1,500 years church music was essentially chants and hymns. With the Protestant Reformation came a serious concern for doctrinal accuracy in church music. With that the modern hymns were born. Much of the greatest music ever written (*Christian as well as secular*) comes from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. *Handel, Bach, Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven* all wrote music for the church. Godly men like *Isaac Watts* and *Charles Wesley* wrote the words.

Then, in the nineteenth century, the literary quality of Christian music improved. The works of hymn writers like *Fanny Crosby* and *Frances Havergal* filled the hymnals.

However, by the dawn of the twentieth century the church was very subtly beginning to lose her desire for majestic music and replacing much of it with what has come to be called "gospel music." It was usually lighter in doctrinal content, but it was more evangelistic, and easier to sing. Our hymnal is also filled with this kind of music, and we do sing some of it.

The last fifty years has seen the rise of "praise songs." There *are* some good ones. And we sing some of them as well. But sadly, much of today's praise music is contributing to the further degradation of biblical doctrine and a shift away from an emphasis on God's absolute truths. Those things are being replaced by an emphasis on peoples' feelings and emotions. Often, *not always*, but often, it sounds like country and western or soft rock.

The fact is that much of today's church neither looks nor sounds like it did only a few decades ago. Why? It is because it does not see God the way it once did, and I am convinced that the demise of true God-honoring worship is one of the major reasons. This demise of true worship has done immeasurable harm to the *Church of Jesus Christ*. *Paul Plew*, Professor of Music at Southeastern University says this...

"A host of churches today have a low view of worship music. The thought is not to lift the Lord high, but to make Him equal with man, identifying the living God with our popular culture. Worship and music are capitulating to an individualistic, narcissistic attitude. There is a deliberate attempt to put the intellect into a passive mode and to work solely on the emotions."

May God protect us at Lighthouse from ever becoming part of that problem! Too often all worship, not just the musical aspects of the worship service, but all aspects of true God-honoring worship, are being downgraded into something that God never intended, and that the Scriptures never endorsed.

Christian songwriter, lyricist, and musician *Steve Camp*, has argued that the modern church must return to its Protestant Reformation roots in every aspect of worship. He recently published an article detailing seven things common to today's church that, while assumed to be worship by many Christians, are not true God-honoring worship at all. Let me paraphrase some highlights of his article.

1. Biblical worship is not emotional exuberance. Worship *does* involve our emotions, but using stimuli to build an emotional response is not biblical. True worship requires true knowledge of God and His Word. Why? Emotions change. Truth does not! At the very center of our worship there must always be a deep reverence for and a holy fear of God.

2. Biblical worship is not mystical experience. Worship is never to be based on human experience over the written Word of God. *Never!* Experiences can be driven by emotion, they can be faked; or worse still, they can be demonically inspired. God's Word must always be preeminent in whatever we do. An unhealthy preoccupation with experiences is one of the major weaknesses of the modern charismatic movement.

3. Biblical worship is not musical performance. I emphasize the word "*performance.*" Biblically sound and doctrinally accurate music is *most certainly* an integral part of true God-honoring worship. But music – *in and of itself* – is not worship. God is far more interested in how our hearts look than in how our music sounds. Listen to Him.

Amos 5:21-24

²¹ *"I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies.*

²² *"Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; and I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings.*

²³ *"Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps.*

²⁴ *"But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an everflowing stream."*

Do you see the point? Beautiful music is just noise if our hearts aren't right before God. Even the right words and good music, when generated from an impure heart, are worthless. They are *not* acceptable worship.

4. Biblical worship is not religious ritual. Liturgies, rites, ceremonies, confessions, and creeds all have their place. But – *in and of themselves* – none of them constitute true worship. However, obedience to God *does* constitute true worship. In **1 Samuel 15** King Saul disobeyed God because he thought he had a better idea. The *Prophet Samuel* asked *Saul* a rhetorical question.

1 Samuel 15:22

²² *“Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice...”*

5. Biblical worship is not legalism. Not doing certain things doesn't make you holy. It only means you don't do certain things. Generating a list of “do's and don'ts” is not worship; it is legalism. True worship, as *Paul* told us in **Romans 12:1**, is turning yourself over to God for *divine sacrificial service* and in the process, being conformed to the image of *Christ*. And by the way, as you do that, God will, over time, reveal to you **His** list of “do's and don'ts.”

6. Biblical worship is not self-indulgence. We are to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Him, are we not? When we try to mix worship with our own felt needs, whatever we think they may be, we are not honoring God. He knows our *real* needs and He has promised to meet them. *Stephen Charnock*, seventeenth century pastor, said this:

“To pretend to pay homage to God and intend only the advantage of self is, rather, to mock Him than (it is to) worship Him.”

7. Biblical worship is not self-actualization. That is to say, worship is not about us, our dreams, and our goals. However, there seems to be no end of preachers on television and authors of pop psychology books that would have you think it is. But the *Lord Jesus* did not die on the cross to give you a more satisfying life. He died to save your eternal soul!

III. Conclusion

We've taken a brief look at what worship is and what it isn't. We'll close with a marvelous picture of a worshipper and the One being worshipped. In **Isaiah 6:1-8** we have a biblical example of true worship. It comes to us directly from the throne room of God.

***Isaiah 6:1-4 – Adoration and Glory**

¹ *In the year of King Uzziah's death, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple.*

² *Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings; with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.*

³ *And one called out to another and said, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.”*

⁴ *And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke.”*

The glory of God fills creation and causes it to shudder in His presence. What a picture of holiness! How does *Isaiah* respond to what he is seeing and hearing?

***Isaiah 6:5 – Humility and Confession**

⁵ *Then I said, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.”*

Isaiah is overwhelmed by the glory of God and immediately confesses his sin. Wouldn't you and I do the same thing? What does God do?

***Isaiah 6:6-7 – Compassion and Forgiveness**

⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me, with a burning coal in his hand which he had taken from the altar with tongs.

⁷ And he touched my mouth with it and said, "Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away, and your sin is forgiven."

What is *Isaiah's* response to God's mercy, grace, forgiveness, and eternal salvation? He is convicted.

***Isaiah 6:8 – Conviction**

⁸ Then I heard the voice of the LORD, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

Immediately upon being assured of his salvation *Isaiah's* desire is to serve his God. He is no longer *self-centered, self-willed, or self-exalting*. On the contrary, *Isaiah* reveres and does homage to God, and He presents himself for *divine sacrificial service*. "*Here am I. Send me!*"

That is true worship. That is worship that is good and acceptable and perfect. God is honored by such worship, and we are blessed by it. May His grace be upon us all as we pour out our praise and adoration to such a great and holy God.

~ Pray ~

There is so much more I would like to say about this subject of true God-honoring worship, but to do so would take another hour. So this morning, I have three handouts for you that will be helpful in furthering the point of today's message. They are...

- ***"The Truth About Worship"*** by Jeremiah Johnson
- ***"Worship in Spirit and in Truth"*** by Ligon Duncan
- ***"Tozer on Worship – A Compilation of A.W. Tozer's Thoughts on the Subject"***

These are all excellent and worthy of your time.