

ACCEPTABLE INDIVIDUAL WORSHIP

Lesson 2 Obligated to Worship John 4:19-24

If we were to approach the average non-Christian man on the street and ask him, “Are you under obligation to worship God?” His answer would probably be, “I am under obligation to no one, not even God. Even if there is a God (and there may not be), I would feel no compulsion to fall before Him as the Sovereign God of the universe.” For the unsaved man, his god is a god of his imagination; a god carved of sticks or stones or conceived in his sin-darkened mind. His god is a god he can “wheel and deal” and one who would be as human or less human than a man. If, however, we were to approach the average professing Christian on the street and ask him about worship, he would reply, “I believe in God and His Son Jesus Christ. I believe in worship but I also believe I can worship my God however, whenever and wherever I desire. If I want to worship God I can; if I do not want to worship God I do not have to!” There also seems to be a humanistic air among many saved people who believe that the worship of God is optional. It is nice but not necessary. Worship to them is something done when they feel like it or are in the mood for it. The Bible tells us that worship is obligatory. God commands worship. God expects worship from all His creatures. Even the non-Christian is under obligation to worship God because he is a creature of God with God’s image stamped upon his soul. God requires worship of every person but all men do not give Him worship because they are sinners and in rebellion to God. They do not want to have the true God ruling their lives. They want to go their own independent ways, pleasing themselves rather than God. The Bible tells us that God has given every man some light about God, but whatever light he receives, he rejects because it means moral obligation to God and men love darkness rather than light.

“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen” (Rom. 1:18-25).

Every fiber in the unsaved man’s body strains at the thought of worship of and servitude

to the true God.

It is an obvious fact that God requires worship from Christians, His people on this earth. **“Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care” (Psa. 95:6-7).** Because of the new birth from the Father, the renewing by the Spirit and the continual work of Jesus Christ in a Christian, he can offer acceptable worship to God. As a Christian, do you know that you are worshipping God in the right way? Are you sure God is accepting your worship? We all must desire to be enlightened on this subject of worship so we can know that we are truly pleasing God and not ourselves or others in worship. We must ask ourselves why do I worship, who do I worship, when do I worship, where do I worship and how do I worship?

WHAT WORSHIP IS

In John 4, Jesus told this Samaritan woman who was morally lewd and sexually debauched that **“God is seeking worshipers”** and those who worship Him **“must worship Him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24).** Men must (obligation) worship the Father. In His evangelization of this woman, Christ told her about worship and her moral obligation to God if she was to be saved and be a follower of Christ. Since Christ put so much emphasis upon worship, we should seek to define it and do it.

Webster’s Dictionary defines worship as “to adore or pay divine honors to a deity; to reverence with supreme respect and veneration; as to worship God.” A.W. Tozer in his small pamphlet, *“Worship, The Missing Jewel of the Evangelical Church,* defines worship as “to feel in the heart and to express this feeling in some appropriate manner.” Tozer’s definition is biblically and theologically weak and leaves the door wide open to radical experiential Christianity. Al Martin in a series of messages on worship defines worship as “the honor, reverence and homage paid to superior beings, whether to a false god or the true God.”

While it is impossible to give a complete definition of worship, any definition at all must come out of the words used in the Bible for worship. In the Old Testament, the primary word for worship is *shahah*, which means “to prostrate oneself before another in order to do him honor and reverence,” (Exo. 4:31). In the Greek New Testament, five words are used to explain worship but only three have deep significance. *Proskuneo* means, “to kiss the hand, to bow down or to prostrate oneself.”

“The twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: ‘You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being’”(Rev. 4:10-11).

Sebomai which means “to revere, stressing feeling of awe or devotion.”

“You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men’” (Matt. 15:7-9).

Latreuo, which means, “to render religious service and honor.”

“For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh . . .” (Phil. 3:3).

From these Biblical words, we can readily see that worship involves both reverence and service.

In light of the Biblical meanings of the words translated worship in the Bible, a general definition of worship is:

“Worship is the activity of the new life in a born again believer in which he recognizes the fullness of the Godhead as manifested in Christ and revealed in Scripture. He seeks according to biblical commands and principles, to render to the living God that glory, reverence and honor which is His due, which will result in spiritual service and activity on the part of the true believer.”

The implications of this definition are many. First, worship involves prostrating oneself before God as a humble sinner saved by grace. This prostration may be the bowing of his knees or head, or it may be a mental attitude where one bows his heart, mind and will to the living God. Second, God is the supreme Creator of all and He is to be treated with respect and dignity. God is not “the man upstairs” or “my big buddy in heaven.” He is not “buddy” but Sovereign. He is not just a friend but a King. He is not to be talked to flippantly but to be honored and respected. Third, in our pragmatically oriented evangelical world where work, witness and warfare are stressed, we need to understand that service alone is not worship. Service is part of worship but true service must always be preceded by true reverence of the Most High God. Fourth, worship is not only giving praises, adorations, thanks and exaltations to God, but is also offering oneself to God as an obedient servant. It is giving to God and not necessarily taking from God.

WHAT WORSHIP IS NOT

There are so many misconceptions about worship in the minds of unsaved and saved alike that it is proper at this point to lay the ax to what some people think is worship but is not true Biblical worship at all.

Nature Worship. Nature worship is based on the natural feelings of men. This type of worship comes from the unregenerate heart, which may or may not relate these natural feelings to God. Nature worship appeals to the senses of man; it is worship on a poetic and philosophical level. It comes as one looks at a beautiful sunset, or the moon

flashing on the expanding ocean, or one's soul is enraptured as he hears beautiful music or reads a moving poem. Many people get rapt feelings as they contemplate and meditate on a great masterpiece of art. Worship, however, is more than love, music and poetry. When one listens to Beethoven's symphonies, he is not necessarily worshipping God. Quite often I hear people say, "I can worship God better in the woods than I can in church." This is nature worship but not worship of the true and living God.

Cain Worship. Cain and Abel were sons of Adam and Eve. Undoubtedly Adam and Eve taught these boys the type of sacrifice and worship that was acceptable to God. They were instructed that God is only satisfied with blood sacrifices, "for without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb. 9:22). Abel obeyed God and his parents teaching and brought an animal sacrifice, but Cain offered the Lord "the fruit of the ground." What was wrong with Cain's sacrifice? He and his brother both came to the same altar, both came to the living God, both came at the right time and both came to sacrifice. What was wrong with Cain's sacrifice? He was religious and sincere and this was in his mind an act of worship. What was wrong? He did not come God's way. Cain offered worship without blood atonement. God will not accept natural, humanistic, man-centered worship. Cain worship comes out of a sincere, unregenerate heart whereby a person thinks he can approach God any way he wants. Yet, there is only one way God will accept worship and that is through the shedding of blood. There is only one way of salvation and that is through the blood of Jesus Christ, the mediator of the New Covenant, and this salvation is appropriated through faith in Christ.

All the people in the world who belong to other religions are not true worshippers of God no matter how sincere they might be because they are rejecting the atonement of Christ. Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, Shintos or whatever are not worshipping the true God because they have rejected Christ, the Mediator of the New Covenant.

Samaritan Worship. Samaritan worship is heretical worship because a person mixes error with truth. Heresy is picking out of the Bible what you want to believe and rejecting or ignoring the rest. Heretical worship springs forth from an unbelieving heart. Samaritan worship can clearly be seen in the Samaritan woman who Christ spoke to when He stopped at the well for a drink of water. She worshipped her concept of God. She went to the temple on Mt. Gerizim in Samaria. She made animal sacrifices and approached God through the priesthood. The Samaritans had set up a rival religion to the true Jewish religion in Jerusalem. Samaritans were heretics. They had some truth but this truth was mixed with error. Therefore, Christ said to this woman, "**You Samaritans worship what you do not know**" (John 4:22). Their worship was close enough to the truth to look real but it was not grounded on the total revelation of the Old Testament, for the Samaritans only accepted the five books of Moses. There may be people who call themselves followers of Christ who are not worshipers of Christ. Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, Christian Scientists, Universal Church people, liberal Protestants and all other cultists and religious modernists are guilty of Samaritan worship. Their worship is heretical worship and God will not accept this kind of worship.

Pharisee Worship. Pharisee worship is to have the truth of God intellectually in the head but not to have a spiritual heart for God.

“So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, ‘Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with ‘unclean’ hands?’ He replied, ‘Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: ‘These people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.’ You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men’” (Mark 7:5-8).

Pharisee worship is done to please men and not God. It is holding to the traditions of men but not really desiring to keep the commands of God as they are revealed in the Bible. People put on a phony religious show. They have worked up a good worship act, but they do not know God personally and their hearts do not beat to please God. Pharisee worship is hypocritical worship.

Both saved and unsaved can perform Pharisee worship. It is possible for a person to go to church, pray, be religious and go through the external motions of Christianity and still never be saved. This person is a mere professing Christian who needs to be born again. However, it is also possible for a true Christian to have carnal attitudes about the worship of God and fall into the externals by trying to please men, by trying to uphold man-made traditions and by having a life spiritually dry and far from God. A Christian can have head facts without a love relationship with God. Beware of Pharisical worship. It is external orthodoxy with no heart for God.

WHY WORSHIP IS IMPORTANT

There are some basic underlying principles of worship that must be understood if we are to plumb the depths of worship individually and collectively.

God has Commanded Worship of Himself. The Bible declares it is our solemn duty to worship God. He has commanded it. He requires it. In the Ten Commandments, God commands His people not to make any idol or likeness of God to worship, as do the non-believing nations. God states that worship belongs to Him alone. He is to be worshiped exclusively.

“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, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Exo. 20:5-6).

When Christ was tempted in the wilderness by Satan our Lord told Satan to worship God only. **“Jesus said to him, ‘Away from me, Satan! For it is written:**

‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only’” (Matt. 4:10). If God commanded Satan to worship Him, how much more are we, God’s children, to worship God? Worship is our duty. Worship is our solemn responsibility. Worship is our basic task to perform towards God. It is not optional. It is essential. Without a sense of our duty to worship God, we will never worship God right or acceptably. Worship of God does not depend on how we feel. If we went only by our feelings, we might never worship Yahweh aright. We Christians are morally bound to worship the one, true and living God as He is manifested in Christ and revealed in Scripture.

God is Concerned as to How Men Worship Him. God is not indifferent to the way men approach Him and worship Him. He is vitally concerned that people worship Him in the right attitude and the right manner. God wants His people to worship Him for the heart.

“When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right” (Isa. 1:12-16)!

God is not impressed with externals. The Jews were meticulously going through their religious worship but God declared His disgust and hatred of external religion with no love, heart and devotion to God in it. In the midst of what appeared to be a thriving Israel politically, economically and religiously, God spoke to the Israelites through the prophet Amos and declared His disdain for their phony worship.

“I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps” (Amos 5:21-23).

God is only pleased with those who worship Him in purity and honesty from the deep recesses of the devoted heart.

“Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God his Savior. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob” (Psa. 24:3-6).

God is not indifferent to how His people worship Him. He is turned off by

externalism, hypocrisy and phoniness. For instance, in our public worship on Sunday morning, God is not one bit impressed with any human feelings we may have for being in church. To Him it is not a matter whether we get a good feeling, whether we see our friends, what type of clothes we are wearing, whether we shake the preacher's hand or whatever. He is only pleased with our heart toward Him and whether we are in public worship to meet Him, and whether we have assembled to interact with our God. This is rendering acceptable public worship to God. The question is not whether we will be pleased or men will be pleased with us but will God be pleased with our worship.

God has Revealed to Us How to Worship. God has not only commanded us to worship Him but has left us divine revelation in the Bible as to how we should worship Him. Because we have the Bible, we can answer the question, "How can I show I am rendering acceptable worship?" For instance, in the Old Testament, we are specifically told we are to have no images or likeness of God as the heathen who materialize their gods.

"You shall have no other gods before me. 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" (Exo. 20:4-4).

Therefore, to have any idols of God or likeness of God is idolatry, and we cannot worship God acceptably with these pagan practices even though we may rationalize our position by calling them aids to worship. God hates them! God has revealed to us in the Bible things that please Him. He does not give two hoots about what we *think* will please Him. He has told us what will please Him.

If we say, "I think God is pleased with my worship," or "I feel God is pleased with my worship," we are on very shaky ground. We cannot trust our minds or our feelings when it comes to the subject of acceptable worship because our minds have been darkened by sin, and even as redeemed men and women we need special revelation on how to worship God. All of our traditionalism that says, "I have been taught to worship this way by my church or parents; I have done it this way and will continue to do it, for I cannot change," must be put under the scrutiny of the Word of God. All of our subjectivism which says, "Worship is what I feel and experience only" must be placed under the light of the Bible. All pragmatism that says, "Worship is good as long as it moves a crowd or gets them to respond:" must be examined in light of the Scriptures. Traditionalism, subjectivism and pragmatism often make the Word of God void.

God has Declared that One of the Marks of True Conversion is True Worship. True worship is one of the direct fruits of the saving work of Christ. Born again Christians are those who are spiritually circumcised in heart by the saving work of Christ and the regenerating and renewing work of the Holy Spirit. They are the worshippers of the Triune God.

“For it is we (Christians) who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh . . .” (Phil. 3:3).

It is an assumed fact that those who are circumcised in heart are true worshipers of God. Therefore, worship will flow to some degree from every genuine Christian. A Christian can worship God in a right manner but he can never worship Him perfectly in this life because sin is still in him. The Christian can learn the right way to worship, enter into deep understanding and experience of worship, but he can never perfectly worship until he gets to heaven. Yet, a true Christian will worship God, and will desire a deeper experience of the worship of the living God.