

ACCEPTABLE INDIVIDUAL WORSHIP

Lesson 3 Worship of God John 4:19-24

How much do we know about worship? Are we offering acceptable worship to God? Worship should be the normal employment of all God's creatures. In Isaiah 6, the prophet was given a vision of the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, and angels were around this throne, saying, **"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty, the whole earth is full of His glory."** The angels were worshipping God because they were created to worship Him. In Revelation 4, the four living creatures did not cease, night nor day to say, **"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is, and is to come."** The twenty-four elders fell down before God's throne and worshipped Him by saying, **"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."** This worship came natural for these creatures because they were created to worship the living God.

Is worship of God our normal employment as a Christian? Does worship of God concern us and does our God occupy our mind? We know that the unsaved man does not want to worship the one, true and living God as He is manifested in Christ and revealed in Scripture, but what about us who are God's children by grace through faith in Christ? Are we, Bible believing, evangelical Christians, truly worshipping God? The average evangelical in America is defective in his ability to worship the Most High God. Why? Evangelical Christians as a whole do not know who God is. An evangelical has an open Bible but he does not study it. Consequently, he has lost sight of the God of Scripture. The hidden person of the Trinity to most evangelicals is God, the Father. They do not worship aright because they are ignorant of God as He is revealed in Scripture.

Worship stands or falls with our concept of God. As evangelicals, we abhor the idea of an image of God carved from sticks, stones or metal. We would oppose pictures of God or any kind of idolatry as a violation of the Ten Commandments. Yet, it may be that we evangelicals may also be idolaters of sorts, but our idolatry is in the mind, for we conceive of a God in our imagination that really does not exist. Idolatry always begins in the mind before an external image is made of one's mental conception of God. There is only one, true and living God and that is the God of Scripture. To the degree evangelicals have a wrong concept of God, then our worship will be defective.

As Christians, we may be idolaters while sitting in church if we have a wrong concept of the God of Scripture. There can be no true and acceptable worship of God if our thoughts of God are not biblical.

The Samaritan woman to whom Christ had spoken concerning salvation was guilty of mental idolatry. She, as all Samaritans, had conceived in her mind a God who did not exist. The Samaritans had set up a rival religion in Samaria to the true Jewish religion in Jerusalem. The Samaritans had their own priesthood, sacrificial system and temple that

set on Mount Gerizim. The Samaritans only accepted the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses, as inspired Scripture and rejected all the other Old Testament books. A Samaritan's concept of God was defective because it was not based on complete revelation. Christ, therefore, in the evangelization of this woman, had to give her a true concept of God and He said, "God is spirit." Or more literally, "The God is spirit." **"God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).** Before this woman could correctly worship God, Christ had to correct some of her defective thinking about God.

WORSHIP IS TO BE GIVEN TO THE GOD REVEALED IN SCRIPTURE

The first concept Christ had to correct in this woman's thinking was concerning the person of God. He is "the God," (Greek definite article) the only, true God as revealed in the whole Old Testament. She ignorantly worshipped because she did not have proper facts about God because she denied the revelation of the Bible about God. She worshiped a god of her imagination and her worship was not acceptable, no matter how sincere she was. She had to worship "the God" of the Old Testament if she was to be a true worshipper of God. Any other god except the God who is revealed in the Bible is a false god.

Who is the God of Scripture? What is He like? God is not like a man. No, He is infinitely more superior to the best of men. In fact, God can never be comprehended totally by any one. No creature on earth or in heaven will ever completely understand who God is because God is infinite and to Him there is no end.

We do know some things about God because they have been revealed to us in the Bible, but even this revelation baffles the human mind. We know that God is self-containing, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, sovereign, eternal, immutable, holy, wrath, love and just. God is all these attributes and more. Yet, we need to try to understand what God has revealed about Himself so we can worship Him for who He is.

God is All-Powerful. God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. God spoke and the world came into existence, and it is revealed to us **"in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1),** and He **"upholds all things by the word of His power" (Heb. 1:3).** God has infinite power to do as He pleases in this world.

God is All-Knowing. God knows everything and He has absolutely no need to learn for He knows all things in Himself. God never wonders about anything. He is never surprised or amazed and He never discovers anything, for He knows everything. God has "perfect knowledge." **"Do you know how the clouds hang poised, those wonders of him who is perfect in knowledge" (Job 37:16)?**

God is Holy. God is a pure being separate from the slightest taint of sin. He is absolute perfection and there is not one defect in His whole essence. God is flawless, spotless, impeccable and unblemished. God is the complete antithesis of sin, and His

majestic holiness makes Him separate from all other creatures. Holiness speaks of God's awful majesty and His hatred of sin. **“Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders” (Exo. 15:11)?**

God is Sovereign. God is sovereign and He does as He pleases in heaven and earth.

“Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: ‘My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please’” (Isa. 46:9-10).

God is supreme. He rules over all. No man can tell God, “What are you doing?” Only a sovereign God is worthy of worship, for a god who is not sovereign is a weak god. In fact, he is not God at all. We worship a sovereign God and we must see Him as preeminent with the right to do all of His good pleasure.

“Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name” (1 Chron. 29:11-13).

God is Wrath. **“God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29).** God's wrath is His hot anger against sin that flows out of His holy nature that hates sin. God's wrath is greatly to be feared, for He must certainly judge all men for their sinfulness and rebellion to Him.

“The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The LORD takes vengeance on his foes and maintains his wrath against his enemies. The LORD is slow to anger and great in power; the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished” (Nahum 1:2-3).

God is Love. God is love and He puts His love on whomever He pleases, and He pleases to put His love on all those who are true believers in Messiah, His Son, Jesus Christ the Lord. It is God's saving love that makes a person a true believer and worshipper of God. **“I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness”(Jer. 31:3).**

It is an obvious fact that when there is ignorance of the one, true and living God there can be no true worship. The starting point to make true worshipers of the Most High God is to teach them knowledge of this God. We must know who God is before we can accurately worship Him. Until men think about God they cannot and will not worship Him right. It is also true that a deficient understanding of God will produce a defective worship of God. Rev. Al Martin says, “Where there is rejection of any revelation of God, worship is defective in proportion to that rejection.” In one sense there is no Christian

who worships God perfectly because sin has an influence on the mind no matter how far a person has progressed in his understanding of God. God accepts even the imperfect worship of His children because He loves us, but He desires a progressive attitude of deeper worship of Himself. God has left us the revelation of Himself in the Bible, and He is progressively sanctifying us so that we might know more about Him and His works. God expects Christians to grow in their understanding, love, appreciation and respect of Him.

We Christians must accept the God of Scripture or we are guilty of mental idolatry and will be defective in our worship of the true God. For instance, any Christian who willfully rejects God's sovereignty in salvation is guilty of making up a god in his mind that does not exist. If a Christian insists upon having a God of pure love only and rejects, ignores or explains away God's absolute justice, holiness and sovereignty in the salvation of men, he is guilty of mental idolatry, preaching a defective gospel and offering deficient worship to the one, true and living God. The Bible declares that God chooses whom He pleases for salvation and He puts His wrath on whom He pleases.

“But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth” (2 Thess. 2:13).

“What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory . . .”(Rom. 9:22-23)?

You cry out, “That is not fair!” God's answer to the question of unfairness is that He is God who rules and controls all and does what He pleases with His creatures.

“But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? “Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’ Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use” (Rom. 9:20-21)?

A Christian will always be defective in his worship of God if he denies God's sovereignty in salvation, for anything less than a sovereign God is not worthy of a person's worship.

As soon as a Christian learns that God rules and reigns, that Christian falls down on his face before God and says, “You chose me to salvation when I should have been damned forever. Because of your grace and love, O God, I have been brought into a saving relation with Christ. I have been bought with the price of Christ's death. Do with me as you please. I am your servant.”

What happens when a person does not see clearly the holiness of God? It is obvious; he does not understand the seriousness of sin or the awfulness of God's hatred of sin and His wrath that burns hot against all sin and sinners. When a man sees God as

holy, he will understand the words given to Moses by God, **“Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground” (Exo. 3:5).** Any denial, perversion or watering down of God’s holiness does not allow a person to give acceptable worship to God.

You say, “It is hard for me to understand the God of Scripture!” Good. That means you are beginning to grasp the grandeur of His person and the mystery of His greatness. We cannot and will not understand all about God. We cannot put God in a box or chart Him on a chalkboard. God has made a revelation of Himself in Scripture and we are to stand in awesome wonder and overpowering love as we contemplate the greatness of His person. He has unspeakable majesty and there will always be a mysterious aspect of God we will never understand because we are finite creatures and He is an infinite God. However, we must learn all we can about the God of the Bible even if we will never comprehend Him. There are aspects of God’s character that we will never figure out, but we can believe them and stand in total wonderment of His glorious person. This feeling of awe and astonishment can only come as we know more about God, and we can only know through the Scriptures. Al Martin says, “As knowledge of God increases, a person becomes more accurate in his worship and his worship becomes more acceptable to God.” We must be growing in admiration and appreciation of God so that our minds are captivated, charmed and entranced with His person. A terrible thing has happened to us when we think we can totally explain, understand and rationalize God. If a person thinks he understands God, he has absolutely no grasp of the mystery and majesty of God, and he is guilty of mental idolatry because he puts God on a level with man. A.W. Tozer says,

“The evangelical rationalism which tries to explain everything takes the mystery out of life and the mystery out of worship, When you have taken the mystery out you have taken God out, for while we may be able to understand Him in some measure, we can never fully understand God. There must always be that awe upon our spirits that says, ‘Ah, Lord God, Thou knowest!’” (*Worship: The Missing Jewel*)

KNOWLEDGE OF THE GOD OF SCRIPTURE PRODUCES WORSHIP

Knowing God is not just having intellectual understanding of facts. Knowing God is having spiritual understanding of God. Whenever a Christian gets a glimpse of God, it always has an effect on his life. A person who encounters God will have a changed life.

Job, who went through horrible sufferings, could not understand why, but in the midst of these sufferings he received a glimpse of God’s controlling providence. He said, **“I am unworthy” (Job 40:4).** He saw God through spiritual eyes and then he saw himself as vile or insignificant. In another place, Job said, **“I despise myself” (Job 42:6),** for spiritual knowledge of God always causes one to see his own sinfulness, inadequacies and shortcomings. **“My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes”(Job. 42:5-6).** When a person sees his own sinfulness, this causes him to cling to God and to worship Him with more fervency.

Daniel was given a vision of God. Perhaps this was a vision of the pre-incarnate Christ. **“I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist. His body was like chrysolite, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude” (Dan. 10:5-6).** When he saw God he declared, **“So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless” (Dan. 10:8).** Daniel spiritually saw God’s almighty, omnipotent power and his own impotence as a man, and he was sapped of all his strength. When one sees God’s power, he sees how puny he is in himself and turns to God for power to live.

Isaiah entered into the divine presence and saw and heard the angels saying **“Holy, holy, holy” (Isa. 6:3).** Isaiah received a glimpse of God’s holiness and cried out, **“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”** Isaiah saw his sin in the presence of God’s holiness. God gave him cleansing. Then God said, **“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us” (Isa. 6:8)?** Isaiah replied, **“Here am I. Send me!” (Isa. 6:8).** A glimpse of God put the fear of God in Isaiah and he went out as an obedient prophet of the Most High God. True worship always results in true service.

The basic reason so called Christian men have lost the art of worship today is that they have lost a high and exalted concept of God. Their God is altogether too human. They have not seen Him as the almighty, holy God who rules and reigns over all. Tozer again says,

“The God of the modern evangelical rarely astonishes anybody. He manages to stay pretty much within the constitution. Never breaks over our bylaws. He’s a very well behaved God and very denominational and very much one of us, and we ask Him to help us when we’re in trouble and look to Him to watch over us when we’re asleep. The God of the modern evangelical isn’t a God I could have much respect for. But when the Holy Ghost shows us God as He is we admire Him to the point of wonder and delight.” (*Worship: The Missing Jewel*)

There are all kinds of results that come when one begins to get spiritual discernment on the person of God, but there are five very basic things that happen when we really begin to grasp the greatness of God.

We Learn about Our Sinfulness. Just as Job, Daniel and Isaiah saw their vileness when they saw God, so we too will see our sinfulness and abhor it. We will never prostrate ourselves or bow down before God, crying out for cleansing and power, until we see God through spiritual eyes.

We Learn to be Silent before God. In wonder of a sovereign God we learn to say, **“Be still and know that I am God” (Psa. 46:10).** We become awe-struck in His holy

presence. While God longs to meet the needs of His people, true worshippers will revel in God's person and love, praise and adore Him for being God. We will not always be asking Him for things but appreciating Him for who He is and what He has done for us. So often our worship of God in prayer is mainly, "Lord, give me this or that." God is not just one who meets needs, but who is to be adored, exalted, extolled, praised and appreciated.

We Learn that God Controls Our Life. As we learn more about God's sovereignty, we also come to learn that He is in control of our life. He loves us as Christians and has a wonderful plan for our life. We learn to depend more on our God by faith so we can have Him lead us and show us experientially His plan for us.

We Learn that God Answers Prayer. Since God is almighty and sovereign, then He has the power to answer prayer. He is not stymied by puny human wills or what seem to be impossible situations. God has the power to do anything and He brings about His plans and purposes through the prayers of His people. God teaches us that we have not because we ask not. Personal prayer and confidence in God are basic to our worship of God.

We Learn to Expect God to Work for Us. Knowing God not only involves resigning ourselves to God's sovereign will, but also involves the excitement of anticipating the supernatural workings of God. We begin to look for the mysterious workings of God in our life. Part of our worship of God is expecting Him to work for us.