

True Worship

Ascribing Worth to the One Who Is Worthy

by Dr. Steven Riser

John 4:23-24 – “But the time is coming and is already here when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for anyone who will worship him that way.”

Introduction: Worship is taking place all around us all the time

Have you ever noticed how much worship is taking place all around you every day? Everybody is extolling somebody or something. Calvin said, “*The human heart is an idol factory.*”

Everybody has an ultimate object of love and loyalty even if it’s just themselves! We spontaneously worship whatever we ultimately love and value. For example, we say things like: “Isn’t she lovely?” “Wasn’t it glorious?” “That’s awesome!” “That’s magnificent!” “We’re # 1!” “I can’t live without you!” When we make comments such as these, we are ascribing worth to someone or some thing.

True worship that enlivens the spirit and expands the truth of God is increasingly rare. As a result of misunderstanding and misappropriating the Willow Creek ministry model, many churches are entertaining the goats rather than feeding the sheep and exalting the one true God who alone is worthy of our worship.

There is in each of us the propensity to miss the praise and the joy of God because we enter worship for all the wrong reasons, reflecting attitudes that kill rather than enhance worship. For example: you simply can’t be a passive spectator if you want to worship God in spirit and in truth; and you can’t focus on yourself and your selfish interests and worship God in spirit and in truth.

As a preacher, I have an advantage over most church members. I come to church early and all by myself. I’m never rushed and I never have strained relations with the family – for no one is with me. But when I was growing up Satan was alive and well in my household on Sunday morning. I used to hide in the closet to keep from attending the church worship service. The good news is that it doesn’t have to be that way on Sunday morning. With a little effort we can make choices that are conducive to having the proper attitude and motivation that will help to lead us into the kind of God-exalting worship that God, our heavenly Father seeks!

What is worship? The word worship literally means to “*attribute worth*” to someone or something. When Christians gather together for worship, we’re attributing worth to God in ways that express our sincere desire to praise and adore Him for who He is and to thank Him for what He does. We praise Him for His creative power, providential provision, mighty deeds, His powerful presence, His precious promises and His life transforming Word. Entering into worship requires that we come expectantly so that the spontaneous presence of God is invited and

experienced from the depth of our being. As we give ourselves to God, we do so wholeheartedly, single-mindedly and enthusiastically – with heart, soul, mind and strength!

Just as half-hearted commitment is nauseating to Christ, so is half-hearted worship. Colossians 3:23 says, “*Whatever you do, do it with all your heart, for the Lord and not for men*” (The Living Bible). A fully devoted disciple wholeheartedly and single-mindedly engages in the godly habits of daily devotions and weekly corporate worship with the family of God.

How does God desire and require us to worship Him?

Jesus said that true worshippers “*worship the Father in spirit and in truth*” (John 4:23).

Friendship and intimacy is something God desires – the Father seeks such worshippers. In John 4:21-24, Jesus contrasts the kind of worship He advocates with the Samaritan’s ignorance in worship. A truncated understanding of biblical truth will invariably lead to the truncated worship of the triune God.

What are some of the positive results of worshipping God in spirit and in truth? Love, obedience, devotion, commitment, profound and passionate loyalty to God’s purpose, plan and priorities. In some small way, we become like the one we worship – like God. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:18, “*But we Christians have no veil over our faces; we can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him.*” True worship is based on love and knowledge, not ignorance and fear.

What does false worship look like? According to William Barclay, false worship is:

- 1) Selective worship – It chooses what it wishes to believe about God and omits the rest. For example, some people say, “*I worship a God of love*”, while ignoring all His other attributes.
- 2) Ignorant worship – Our practice is based on God’s revealed and prescribed manner of worship. The regulative principle states that God is to be worshipped only as He proscribes in His Word.
- 3) Superstitious worship – Because many are afraid of what might happen if they completely ignore God, they engage in superstition, unrealistic or magical thinking – an attempt to control or to manipulate the deity for their selfish ends.

How many of you view prayer as a means of getting God to grant your selfish requests? (1 John 5:14-15) True worship isn’t selective, ignorant or superstitious; it’s comprehensive based on truth and love. True worship is based on God’s love for us and our gratitude in response to God’s grace. True worship is based on God’s comprehensive revelation of Himself in Creation and Scripture. Worshipping in spirit and in truth is the kind of worship which God desires and requires.

What is the nature of true worship?

It is grace-based worship. The first miracle of Jesus was at the wedding feast at Cana when He turned water into wine (John 2:1ff). I believe this miracle symbolizes what happens to us when Jesus comes into our lives. There’s a new quality of life analogous to turning water into wine – from merely existing to abundant living!

Without Jesus life is dull, flat and stale; with Jesus life is vivid, sparkling and exciting. With Jesus we have a new beginning, a new nature, a new purpose, a new peace and a new love! All you have to do is to look at the response of those who encountered Him with repentance and

faith. When the Spirit gives us a new nature and Christ enters our hearts, worship erupts within us. We have a desire to be better persons because God's reputation is at stake in our lives.

Specifically, what are some of the ways in which true worship takes place?

- Instead of seeking our own glory, or glorifying others, we want to give God the glory.
- Instead of being self-centered or other centered, we want to be Christ-centered.
- Instead of trying to take all the credit, we want to give God the thanks and the credit.
- Instead of putting ourselves first, we want to put God first in our lives (Col. 1:18a).
- Instead of foolish pride, we want to humble ourselves before God (Jas. 4:6, 10).
- Instead of rebelling against God, we want to please Him in all we do (Col. 1:10).
- Instead of trying to merit God's approval, we accept His gift of free grace.
- Instead of doing our own thing, we want to do the will of God.
- Instead of thinking we know what's best; we want to receive God's best.

What are some specific characteristics of Christian worship?

Christian worship is:

1. Gratitude in response to God's grace, not works based.
2. Based on God's revealed truth, not ignorance based.
3. Internal (spiritual), not external (superficial).
4. Attitudinal, not rote or ritualistic actions.
5. Genuine or sincere, not false or hypocritical.
6. Biblical, not man-made or based on human traditions.
7. Wholehearted, not half-hearted.
8. Passionate, not lukewarm.
9. 24/7 not just Sunday at 11:00.
10. Focused on God (Theocentric), not on others (anthropocentric).
11. A precious privilege, not a perfunctory duty or obligation.
12. Christ-centered, not self-centered.
13. Costly – we are called to offer our lives as a living sacrifice.
14. Trying to please an audience of One; it is not entertaining the people.
15. Spiritual, not merely formal liturgical.
16. Orderly, not chaotic and confusing.
17. An enjoyable privilege, not a boring burden.
18. What you make it. Put nothing in and you will get nothing out.
19. Our most important attitude and activity of everyday of our lives.
20. A lifelong process of becoming a healthy and transformed disciple.
21. The genuine expression of love from our hearts to God.

22. Our only permanent activity – it will continue throughout all eternity.
23. Extolling God's worth, not our own worth.
24. Involves personal devotions as well as corporate celebrations.
25. Allows for freedom of the expression of our hearts.
26. Involves our spirit coming into vital contact of the Holy Spirit.

Comprehensive (not selective) worship

Christian worship is comprehensive in that it engages the mind, will, emotions, body and spirit.

- We worship with our renewed mind (Phil. 2:3-5)
- We worship with our sanctified emotions (Rom. 12:11-15)
- We worship with our regenerated spirit (John 4:23-24)
- We worship with our rededicated bodies (Rom. 12:1-2)
- We worship with prayer and in sharing the Word (Col. 3:15-17)
- We worship by sharing with God some of the money resources He has given us.
- We worship (proclaim God's worth) as we engage in unselfish service

What is the context of God exalting worship?

The context is: *the community of the faithful* in a local congregation (Heb.10:23-24). God wants our body, minds, soul and spirit to be rested and refreshed, hence the Sabbath. If we would seek spiritual health and vitality, we must see the wisdom of God's Sabbath rest. If we have any hope of pleasing God, we must see the priority of weekly corporate worship. If we don't receive proper rest on Saturday night it'll hinder our Sunday corporate worship.

What are some benchmarks of Christ-honoring spiritual vitality?

1. Preparation for corporate worship begins on Monday morning with daily devotions. Fully devoted disciples regularly prepare for corporate worship with a vital devotional life. Corporate worship is the most important hour of the week if we come properly prepared. Growing disciples enter corporate worship with an attitude of anticipation and expectation. We expect to encounter God and to hear from God so He can work in and through us. We need more time than the five minute prelude to adequately prepare for corporate worship.
2. Active participation is a necessary prerequisite for true and effective worship. God is the audience and the church members are the actors seeks to please an audience of One.

How often have you heard or perhaps even made one of the following remarks?

- I didn't get anything out of the worship service today.
- I didn't get a thing from the pastor's message.
- I don't like it whenever the choir sings classical music.
- I don't like it whenever the worship service goes past noon.

Any of these sound familiar? The common thread is one of getting something out of worship. The common thread in all these statements is "I." They display a self-centered frame of reference.

Do we come together primarily to seek to please God or to feel good and to get our needs met? We go to worship to give, not to get. We go to please an audience of One. It is only in pleasing

God that we truly worship. God will give us what we need to receive. Selfish people don't make good worshippers because worship is inherently unselfish. The idea of worship as an act of giving has been displaced with a "*consumer mentality*." When it comes right down to it, we're to worship God: humbly, lovingly, receptively and with an attitude of joyful giving. That's the kind of worship our Heavenly Father seeks.

3. If you stop and think about it, different worship and preaching styles are inevitable. If there was only one denomination, we would still have a wide diversity of worship styles. If there was only one seminary, we would still have a wide variety of preaching styles. The fact is there are huge variations within the Christian community. Let's not get in a rut! Our heart attitude is more important than the specific preaching style or form of worship. In true Christian worship, substance is always more important than style.

4. We need to take the necessary steps to guard against needless and unnecessary distractions. Most people are too easily distracted in both personal devotions and corporate worship. If you find you have extraneous thoughts, you can remove them by writing them on paper. Private prayer is a way to deal with distractions that keep us from hearing the voice of God. Instead of being distracted by other people around us, we need to pray for them. We need to quiet our hearts in order to become receptive to the Spirit's empowering presence.

5. What can you do to further enhance your worship experience? Believe it or not, enhancing our corporate worship begins with being an active member of a local church: Why? Because our membership vows promise God that we will make worship our priority! Why? Corporate worship takes place in the context of the family of God – Body of Christ. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, "*Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*"

Thank God if you have a local church to call your spiritual home. There are far too many spiritual gypsies going from church to church instead of making a clear commitment to and becoming a vital part of a specific local congregation. The longer you're a part of a local church the more you'll give to and receive from that family.

We need to come to worship with a clear conscience by asking and offering forgiveness. Jesus said in Matthew 5:23-24, "*Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.*"

Here is the take away question for your prayerful consideration: What practical steps can you take: 1) To cultivate the godly habit of daily devotions; and 2) To make weekly corporate worship a priority (the most important hour of the week)?