



Worship – Part 1
Measuring Worship
GCSP – 04/14/2007

John MacArthur relates the following account in the book, "The Ultimate Priority."

In the late 1970's or early 1980's, a particular woman from New Mexico was frying tortillas. When she pulled one of the tortillas from the frying pan, she noticed the burn marks resembled the face of Jesus. She stopped what she was doing and excitedly showed the tortilla to her husband and all of her neighbors. They all agreed that a face was etched in that tortilla and it did resemble Jesus.

The woman took the tortilla to her priest to have it blessed. If that is not sad enough, the priest did indeed bless the tortilla.

The woman testified that the tortilla had changed her life. Her husband agreed that she had been a more loving, peaceful, and submissive wife since the tortilla had arrived.

The tortilla was placed in a glass case in the woman's home on a cushion of cotton, to make it look as if it were floating in the clouds. An altar was built and a little shrine was opened for visitors to come and view the tortilla. In the first few months, over 8,000 people came to the shrine of the Jesus of the Tortilla. All agreed that it was indeed the face of Christ – with the exception of one reporter who said it looked more like former heavyweight boxing champion Leon Spinks.

Why on earth would so many people worship a tortilla? It seems incredibly ridiculous to ascribe any worth to a tortilla, other than it being something to eat. But sadly, this distorted view of worship has been around for almost as long as mankind has roamed the earth. And while the Bible is abundantly clear about how and whom to worship, very little genuine worship takes place today. I would even go so far as to say, worship is one of the most misunderstood doctrines in all of Scripture. And this tragic misunderstanding spiritually cripples untold multitudes of believers, because a proper understanding of worship is vital to any full application of Scripture.

The topic of worship is immense. Worship touches every aspect of your Christian life. There will be absolutely no appreciable and sustained spiritual growth in your life apart from worship. Worship permeates every other doctrine of Scripture.

At some point during the course of this study, we will see how worship is at the heart of our relationship to God and our relationships to those around us. Worship is at the heart of our submission to God and our submission to government authorities, to employers, to spouses, to leadership in the church, and to each other. Worship is at the heart of our service to God, to the church, and to our neighbors. Worship is at the heart of our giving of our material means to God and to others. Worship is at the heart of our Christian existence.

There is not any one way to define worship. At many times through this series I will most likely say, "Worship is..." Just know that when I do this, I am giving you one of many descriptions of what worship is. I am not sure the word can ever completely be defined in our feeble human minds.

Most Christians primarily associate worship with singing songs in church. And while singing can help facilitate worship, and while you can genuinely worship God through singing, you can also

sing church songs until your voice is gone and never truly worship God. Worship is infinitely more than singing songs about God.

Worship is sacrifice. Worship is not confined to your material means. You can be wealthy and worship, but you can also be destitute and worship. You don't have to be a certain height, weight, age, or color to worship. You can worship if you have a job or if you are unemployed. You can worship if you live in Kathmandu or if you live in South Park. You can worship if you have excellent health or if you are on your deathbed. You can worship when you are alone and you can worship in a crowd. You can worship in the lowest valley and on the highest mountaintop. You can worship in the traffic gridlocks of big cities and you can worship in a field of golden corn.

But you cannot worship improperly – that is, you cannot worship apart from the guidelines God gives us in His Word. God does not accept any and all forms of worship. Through the years, I have had many well-meaning folks tell me about how they worship God in their own way. God is very specific in His Word on the methods, modes, and attitudes that constitute acceptable worship. And if you choose to ignore His Word concerning the act of worship, you may as well go to New Mexico and worship the tortilla.

Beloved, I will admit to you that I still have much to learn on this doctrine myself. I have been reading, studying, and even teaching this topic (on Monday nights) for the last 4-6 months, and the deeper I dig, the more I discover how much true and genuine worship has been lacking in my life.

So I need a commitment from you before we go any further tonight. I need you to pray for me. I need you to pray that God will purify me to the point of being able to fully understand what the Bible tells us concerning worship, that God will reveal to me the changes needed in my life, and that God would enable me to communicate these truths in an abundantly clear way to all who attend our services over the next several months. Then pray that God will open your heart and mind to His glorious truth concerning this immensely vital topic of worship. How many of you can I count on?

When the Amalekites attacked Moses and the children of Israel, Joshua gathered an army to do battle and Moses, Aaron, and Hur ascended to the top of the mountain overlooking the battlefield. When Moses held his hands up, the Israelites would prevail in the battle. When Moses would drop his hands, the Amalekites would prevail. Moses' arms grew heavy and tired and he could no longer hold them up in the air on his own. Aaron and Hur then took position on each side of Moses and they each held one of Moses' arms in the air until the battle had been won.

I am not placing myself in the category of Moses, but I need your help and support in the leading of this church. By consistently praying, you will be like Aaron and Hur holding the arms of Moses up until the victory was won.

Let's go to prayer right now.

Amos 7:1-9

Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, then Amos – if you are having trouble finding this tremendous book of God's Word.

In this passage, Israel is given three warnings. God is on the verge of passing judgment on the sins of His people. The first two impending judgments were stopped by the pleas of the prophet

Amos. Amos prayed to and begged God to not go through with the judgments. Amos was able to prophetically see God preparing these judgments and it shocked him to the core.

We do not see the details of the third judgment but we do see God revealing to Amos how He is gauging the Israelites, and thus, the justice of His righteous judgment against them.

The vision is that of God standing at a wall with a plumb line. A plumb line is simply a string with a weight attached. When you hold the line up in the air, gravity will pull the weight straight down – giving you a true vertical. The “wall” was initially built to true vertical – meaning it was perfectly straight and level. God is about to check Israel to see if the nation is as upright as they claim to be.

Israel had started out correctly. God graciously called this people to Himself. God gave them His perfect and complete Law to govern their lives. They had everything they needed to pass the test – but would they? We know the answer is, of course, no. There is absolutely no chance. The children of Israel had deviated so far from God’s design it is laughable. They were disobedient, idolatrous, and sinful to the core.

God’s plumb line will measure every aspect of Israel’s obedience and adherence to His standards and principles. God’s plumb line will also measure our obedience and adherence to His standards for worship. The Bibles you hold in your laps is this divine plumb line we are talking about.

In **Mark 12:29-30**, Jesus quotes from God’s Law and calls this the greatest, the first and foremost, of all God’s commandments: **“Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength”** (NIV).

Exodus 20:2-5

One of the principles of Bible study is to pay attention to what is emphasized in God’s Word. Emphasis is made when God repeats something, when He flat out says, “Pay attention to this,” and by how much space He devotes a particular topic.

In the Old Testament, worship was the focus of God’s people. The description and details of worship recorded in the Book of **Exodus** alone requires 243 verses, which are contained in 7 chapters. You could rightly say the better portion of the entire Books of Leviticus and Numbers are devoted to the topic of worship, and a good portion of the Book of Deuteronomy. Almost every one of the 150 Psalms we have recorded includes or is totally devoted to worship. Yet God only devoted 31 verses to the creation of the universe.

God’s Tabernacle (the mobile or traveling Temple) was designed for only one purpose – to worship. To go into the Tabernacle for any other reason was the vilest blasphemy. If you ever study the Tabernacle, you will find there are no seats. The children of God did not go to the Tabernacle to attend a church service or to be entertained for a few hours. They went worship God. All other meetings of the people happened elsewhere.

The arrangement of the camp suggested that worship was the central focus. The Tabernacle was set up in the center of the camp. The priests were then set up surrounding the Tabernacle, for they were the leaders of the worship. The Levites were next – they were involved in service to help facilitate worship. Beyond the Levites, the twelve tribes would set up camp, again surrounding the Tabernacle, and with each encampment of these tribes facing the center, the place of worship.

All the political, social and religious activity of Israel revolved around the Law of God. The ceremonial offerings and sacrifices prescribed by the Law were all acts of worship. The very first offering on the list was the burnt offering. It was unique, because the entire offering was consumed completely. It was an offering totally to God. No part was shared by the priests, or the one who offered it, as was done in the other offerings.

Whenever you read about the different offerings in the Bible, the burnt offering is always the first one on the list, because when anyone would come to God, he was to come first in an act of worship – an act where all is given to God. The priority of worship is beautifully expressed in this.

The detail given in the Law for worship is precise. Let me show you one example.

Exodus 30:34-36

Incense is symbolic of worship in the Bible because the fragrance rises – just like our praise and worship rises to the Father. God prescribed a special recipe for this incense and declared it as holy. He then placed some restrictions on its use.

Exodus 30:37-38

Do you know what the term, “cut off from his people” means? - Death. If anyone used this very same recipe for their own personal use they were to be put to death. Now tell me, based on only this one example, are you absolutely sure that it is okay to worship God in your own way, or do you think it might be worthwhile to find out what the Bible has to say on the topic?

The ceremonial part of God’s Law is no longer required of us today. The specific offerings and sacrifices were done away with when Christ died on the cross, but I have to tell you, I would still not be making incense by this recipe for my own personal use today – even if I knew what these ingredients were.

Clearly God is showing us that there is something so utterly unique and holy about worship that not only sets it apart from any other activity, but should drive us to know and understand everything He has to say on the topic.

Romans 12:1-2

When we present ourselves to God, it is an acceptable form of worship. And how do we present ourselves to God? – By obeying His Word. Our obedience to the principles and commands of this Book is the only way we can properly present ourselves to Him.

2 Corinthians 2:14-16a, says, **“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma of death to death, to the other an aroma of life to life”** (NASB).

Remember how I just said incense is symbolic of worship? Here, Paul is referring to our lives as being a fragrance to God. Not just any fragrance, but the fragrance of Christ to God. And where does this fragrance come from? – Through the knowledge of God. And where does the knowledge of God come from? – Through the reading, the studying, the meditating on, the memorizing of, and the obeying of God’s Word.

If you wanted to break it down, pure and simple, worship is obedience. Over the course of the next several months, we will explore many aspects of worship, but we will always come back to this single principle when we practically apply the how's and when's of worship – be obedient to His Word. Don't do things your own way, don't assume you know what's right, don't circumvent God when dealing with the issues of life, but instead, find out what God has to say concerning every area of your life, and obey.

I will be taking you through many examples in Scripture when God's people worshiped in wrong ways – and the consequences that went along with it. We are going to look at four specific kinds of unacceptable worship, with biblical examples, and how we can be guilty of these today. And then we will look at the kinds of worship that are acceptable in His eyes, and how that translates to our lives today. In the process of all of this, we will be getting to know God better and we will understand what it means to fear and reverence God properly.

The only question you need to answer at this point: Is God worthy of my praise and my worship? If the answer is an emphatic "YES," then make it a point to be here throughout this series.

Let's pray.