

## QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

### 64.1 What Is the Christian View of Worship?

#### Part I

*Scripture: John 4:22-24*

Very great and all-majestic is the God we profess. We declare Him to be the God of the endless galaxies. From His mighty fingertips have come the many stars . His dominion is beyond our imagination. System after system, countless luminous bands of stars extend to the rim of the universe. One would suppose it not difficult to Worship a God of this magnitude and power. Nor is this God lost in the vastness which He has created. He has told us about Himself in writing, and even gone so far as to enter His creation in a way which is personal.

Yet, we find that our worship of Him is a concept which often defies precise explanation and understanding. Some feel that the primary worship of God is seen in the preaching of the gospel. This was the view of Martin Luther. Thomas Merton and Francis Bacon felt God was best met in solitude and through nature. Robert Webber, in his book, **Common Roots: A Call to Evangelical Maturity**, emphasizes the marriage of intellect and emotion in worship ever mindful of basic historical roots. Many equate worship with the Sunday morning service. It is the singing of hymns, praying and listening to the choir and pastor. Some center on the experience of worship. The feeling is that for worship to be meaningful, they must be moved, in some way or the gathering was not worth while.

Other definitions of worship include the following. "Worship is an ascription of worth. The only adequate response to God's nature and what He has done in Christ." Another, "worship is an attitude of the heart to seek God's truth, apply it to my life, and in so doing to honor Him." Worship is further defined as "a practical demonstration of the fact that one knows God. And because one knows God, who He is and what He has done, a demonstration of this special relationship is the attribution of worth to Him." Finally, "worship is the assembly of God's people in His presence, during which God reveals Himself so that His people in turn can render reverent but joyful homage for who He is and what He has done." Also, "worship is the outgoing love of a human being expressed in words, thoughts, or song to the God whom he has learned to know

and whose friendship has become a reality to him.” Doubtless, these definitions contain much truth about worship. Let us seek to understand them better by asking the following questions.

## I. WHY WORSHIP?

The famous Swiss theologian Karl Barth wrote, “Christian worship is the most momentous, the most urgent, the most glorious action that can take place in human life.” If this be true, one of the reasons is because we learn from Scripture that worship gladdens the heart of God. Please turn with me to John 4:23; Hebrews 13:15-16; 1 John 3:22, and Proverbs 12:22. We might imagine God tolerating us or even forgiving us if He is a God of love, but delighting in us is quite another matter.

Another reason for worship lies in the fact that we are most truly being ourselves in worship. The person who cries, “Worship is not for me,” is betraying his unique personhood. Thinkers have long insisted upon the separation of man and beast as being noted in man's predilection to worship. Tozer is right when he says, “It takes a man to bow down.” Here is man's key to being.

**Thirdly**, we worship God because we have learned to delight ourselves in Him. (Psalm 37:4) This is another way of saying that we enjoy the God we have come to know. Real worship is an expression of the pleasure we experience in having fellowship with God. If this aspect is not present, worship is labored and forced. That is why so often I welcome you “to this celebration of worship here on the hill in Wilton.” Call it a festival if you will. We have said before that the word **worship** derives from the Anglo-Saxon **weorthscipe** (weorth meaning worthy or honorable; **scipe** meaning ship). Thus we have come to enjoy the worth of God. It is not only that He is worth our worship, but that such worth has become meaningful to us in a personal way. We are a people who have become aware of God's worth. I might say in passing that this is the reason why some people absent themselves from assemblies of worshipers. A person who does not enjoy God hardly feels comfortable being with those who do.

## II. WHO IS WORSHIPED? (Illustration: Thomas K. Beecher)

There is an inherent reasonableness about worship. There is an object who is God. The non-worshiper fails to see the value of the object and may persist in not doing so. Such worth is described in the Scripture in the following ways:

### 1. He Is the Living God:

This is a very great emphasis in the pages of the New Testament. Look with me at the following verses found in Hebrews 9:14, 11:6; Acts 14:13; I Corinthians 8:4; Hebrews 10:31; I Thessalonians 1:9. In the Old Testament there are the interesting words in Habakkuk 2:18-20. We also have the example of Elijah who chided the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. There was no answer for them because there was no God. (I Kings 18:24-29)

### 2. He Is the Creator and Sovereign God:

In Acts 4 we find lordship and creation next to one another in worship. It is not Sunday worship, but it is a spontaneous affirmation of the presence and power of God in a desperate cry for help. (Acts 4:26-29; 2:23) In this same passage the feeling of worship is evident in the quotations from Exodus 20:11; Nehemiah 9:6; and Psalm 146:6 in reference to creation. Paul in Acts 17:22 accuses the Athenians of worshipping **sebasmata**, or images. This in contrast to the creator God. This same idea of worship is linked with creation in Romans 1:18 and Revelation 4:9.

### 3. He Is the Unchanging God:

The prophet Malachi wrote, *"I am the Lord; I change not."* (3:6) This thought is also seen in Psalm 102:27, *"Thou art the same."* The New Testament counterpart is seen in Hebrews 13:8, *"Jesus Christ the same yesterday and today and forever."* The moods of nature, the nations, and people, change. Not so with the God we worship. Our welcome is certain.

### 4. He Is the Holy God:

No more meaningful passage is to be found than Isaiah 6:1-8. Several movements in worship can be lifted from this text, but our concern is with verses 3-5. We note the holiness of God. The emphasis of Scripture in so many places is not the power of God, but His holiness. (Psalm 99:5; Leviticus 11:43-45; **Illustration of Tabernacle:** Exodus 26:30-33)

### 5. He Is the God Who Invites and Receives:

A study of the Bible shows clearly that God has taken the initiative in drawing near to men through the promise and coming of a redeemer so that men might in turn draw near to God in worship. The Apostle James

writes, "*Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you.*" This "*drawing nigh*" was an Old Testament expression having to do with the spiritual ministry of the priests. (Exodus 19:22; Ezekiel 44:13) It now has become our lot through Christ to do so. (Hebrews 4:16, 7:19)

For our purposes this morning, these are first movements in true worship. We would know why it is incumbent upon mortal beings to worship, and without some knowledge of the object, it is questionable if worship can take place.

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