

33. The Gospel of John—4:23-24

“True Worship” Pt.3

(6/17/18)

We are currently in part 3 of a 4 part series we’ve entitled “True Worship”.

The focus of this series has been John 4:23-24—

John 4:23-24 (NKJV)

²³ But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ²⁴ God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

As we have already pointed out, the subject of worship permeates and dominates the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

It is a subject that is very important to God and one that He wants to be just as important to us.

In Israel a man could become a soldier at age 20; a Levite could begin his service to God at age 25—but a man couldn’t become a priest, who was a leader of the worship of God, until age 30.

It was God’s way of communicating to His people that worship was the priority and demanded the highest level of maturity because it carried with it the greatest responsibility.

Last week, we looked at: **I. The Definition of Worship**

II. The Act of Worship

When it comes to worship there are only 2 kinds—true worship and false worship or *acceptable* and *unacceptable* worship.

This is implied from our text in John's gospel where Jesus said that the Father is seeking true worshipers.

The fact that God is looking for *true* worshipers implies that there must be *false* worshipers out there—a fact that Jesus affirmed when He said to this Samaritan woman—

John 4:22 (NKJV)

²² You [plural—‘you Samaritans’] worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.

God must be worshiped on His terms—to offer up to Him forms of worship that are contrary to the guidelines He has laid down in His Word is to offer Him unacceptable worship.

The fact is (and I don't say this carelessly) that most of the world is offering God unacceptable worship—because it is man-centered and works oriented.

But since a person's eternity (again not something I say flippantly) is dependent on what kind of worshiper they are (true or false)—it becomes extremely important that we understand what true worship is all about.

Before we look at what true worship is let's take some time this morning to look at what false or unacceptable worship is.

A. Unacceptable Worship

Let's look at 4 different kinds of unacceptable worship.

1. The Worship of False Gods

There is only one true God, the God of the Bible—all others are false gods

no other God except the God of the Bible:

Isaiah 45:21-22 (NKJV)

²¹ Tell and bring forth *your case*; Yes, let them take counsel together. Who has declared this from ancient time? *Who* has told it from that time? *Have* not I, the LORD? And *there is* no other God besides Me, A just God and a Savior; *There is* none besides Me. ²² "Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I *am* God, and *there is* no other.

God has also told us that He is a jealous God who will not tolerate the worship of another—

Isaiah 42:8 (NKJV)

⁸ I *am* the LORD, that *is* My name; And My glory I will not give to another, Nor My praise to carved images.

Exodus 34:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name *is* Jealous, *is* a jealous God),

And yet the people of this world constantly refuse to worship and glorify the one and only true God of creation—

Romans 1:20-21b (NKJV)

²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, ²¹ because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful...

This simply means that these people wouldn't worship Him—they wouldn't give Him the glory, praise, thanksgiving, adoration and honor due Him.

Not only that, but they went so far as to refuse to acknowledge His existence even though His invisible attributes (proving His existence) are clearly seen in everything He has made in the world.

And refusing to worship the true God and having turned their backs on Him—

Romans 1:21c-22 (NKJV)

²¹ [they]...became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Professing to be wise, they became fools,

Having rejected God, they turned to idolatry and began to make for themselves images to worship—

Romans 1:23, 25 (NKJV)

²³ and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man--and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things...²⁵ who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Imagine, rejecting the God who made them, refusing to worship the Creator and instead worshiping the creation—and verse 22 says they actually thought it was intelligent to do so (like evolutionists)—

Romans 1:24, 32 (NKJV)

²⁴ Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves...³² who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

The worship of false gods is unacceptable to God and those who practice this kind of thing will be judged by Him someday—no matter how sincere they might have been (Prov.14:12).

Listen, everyone worships someone or something—even an atheist.

He worships himself in defiance of the true God and believes there will never come a day of reckoning where he will have to answer to that God—because he has done away with Him in his mind, claiming He doesn't exist.

We see the rebellious heart of man portrayed in defiance against his Creator's right to reign over our lives in William Henley's classic poem *Invictus*—

"Out of the night that covers me black as the pit from pole to pole, I thank whatever gods may be for my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance, I have not winced nor cried aloud. Under the bludgeoning of chance my head is bloody but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears looms but the horror of the shade. And yet but the menace of the years finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how straight the gate, how charged with punishments the scroll, I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul."

There are many different gods that people can and do worship.

People can make a god out of money, power, pleasure, material things—or they can make *themselves* into 'god' and worship themselves (humanism).

One author rightly said,

"In our society idolatry is not so much a matter of making gods of wood and stone. We tend to worship gods of chrome and steel and glass (automobiles, houses, antiques, 31-inch color screens, etc.). Our generation is steeped in idolatry—only it is a respectable idolatry, instead of a heathen idolatry. It is a polished form of idolatry instead of a crude form."

Idolatry is idolatry and is all the same to God because worship given to anyone or anything other than to the true and living God is unacceptable no matter how sincere and well-meaning it may be and will have eternal consequences for those who practice it—

Exodus 20:4-5 (NLT2)

⁴ “You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea. ⁵ You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods...

Acts 17:29-31 (NKJV)

²⁹ Therefore...we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. ³⁰ Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, ³¹ because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness..."

So then, the first kind of unacceptable worship is—

1. The Worship of False Gods**2. The Worship of the True God in a Wrong Way**

God has given us, in His Word, very explicit instructions on how He is to be properly worshipped.

In His Word, God has forbidden us to reduce Him to an image, which we then bow down, and worship as God. (Exodus 32:1-10—Explain)

When the children of Israel said, “*This is your God, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!*” (v.4), they were saying that the golden calf was their representation of Jehovah God—in other words, they had reduced the true God to an image.

Israel was not worshipping a false god—they were worshipping the true God in a wrong and unacceptable way.

And God was so upset by this that He threatened to destroy that entire generation (Exodus 32:10).

Moses interceded for the nation and God spared them—but it does communicate to us that this is also a form of worship that God forbids and will punish.

This is what Jesus meant when He said that true worshipers worship God in spirit and *in truth*.

When people use an image to represent God and then use it for prayer or worship—this is the same thing God became so angry at the children of Israel for doing.

This includes the use of statues, crucifixes, pictures, tortillas (last week's study) or anything else to represent God in worship—why?

Because God is an omnipresent Spirit Who is without form as we know it and is not confined to any one place.

Isaiah 40:18-22, 25 (NLT2)

¹⁸ To whom can you compare God? What image can you find to resemble him? ¹⁹ Can he be compared to an idol formed in a mold, overlaid with gold, and decorated with silver chains?

²⁰ Or if people are too poor for that, they might at least choose wood that won't decay and a skilled craftsman to carve an image that won't fall down! ²¹ Haven't you heard? Don't you understand? Are you deaf to the words of God—the words he gave before the world began? Are you so ignorant? ²² God sits above the circle of the earth. The people below seem like grasshoppers to him!... ²⁵ "To whom [or what] will you compare me? Who is my equal?" asks the Holy One.

In other words, if you try to reduce God to a visible object of anything—

If you turn Him into something that can be seen and touched—what you make to represent Him is infinitely less than what He really is (an infinite, omnipresent Spirit) and therefore it is a false representation—a false god which then leads to false worship.

Psalm 139:7-10 (NLT2)

⁷ I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! ⁸ If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there. ⁹ If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, ¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me.

To reduce God to anything which you then pray to or worship is to bow before a false god—and God condemns it in the strongest possible way.

I have heard people say, “*Well, God as I perceive Him to be is such and such and so and so...and I believe that God will accept me because I’m good and sincere...*”

Look, someone’s *personal* perception of God isn’t important, and neither is *their* ideas on how *they* think He ought to be worshipped.

It only matters what God says about Himself and how He is to be worshipped—Jesus said, “*God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*” (John 4:23)

So far, under the heading of unacceptable worship, we have looked at—

1. The Worship of False Gods

2. The Worship of the True God in a Wrong Way

3. The Worship of the True God in a ‘Self-styled Way

This form of worship is where a person worships the true God but then formulates and molds their worship of Him to their own personal liking or definition.

In other words, they’re doing their own thing, they’re worshipping God on their terms, or in other words, they’re guilty of—‘do it yourself’, or ‘self-styled’ worship.

The Jews were guilty of this—

Romans 10:3 (NKJV)

³ For they being ignorant of God's [system of] righteousness, and seeking to establish their own [system of] righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God [in Christ].

In other words, they refused to worship God according to His guidelines and had instead established their own system of worship. (Comment)

This kind of “*do-it-yourself*” worship is all too common today—but it is unbiblical and unacceptable to God.

This would include the worship of God thru things like: rituals, sacraments, lighting of candles, bare-foot processions...etc.

Any attempt to approach God on our terms through man-made forms of worship is totally unacceptable to Him (like Cain offered to God).

In the book of Leviticus, chapter 10, it records for us the beginning of the priestly ministry to God in the Tabernacle.

Aaron, who was the High Priest, had 4 sons who were all entering the priesthood, two of them were Nadab and Abihu.

In Leviticus 10 we come to their ordination day into the priesthood where they would now begin to lead the people of Israel in the worship of God—

Leviticus 10:1-3 (NKJV)

¹ Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. ² So fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. ³ And Moses said

to Aaron, "This is what the LORD spoke, saying: 'By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified.' " So Aaron held his peace.

God will not tolerate worship by those who take the holiness of God lightly (v.3), nor does He want our worship or service to Him to be under any artificial stimulant.

Verse 9 tells us that they may have been drunk when they burst into God's presence to offer incense (worship) to Him.

Again, God doesn't want our worship or service to Him to be done under any artificial stimulant (not just drugs or alcohol, but also a desire for money, prestige, a nice career package from the denomination)—there are many things that 'stimulate' a person's heart to serve God—but God only accepts worship and service to Him if it's from a heart of love and devotion.

The Lord had instructed them on the proper way to approach Him and worship Him—but in their misguided 'zeal' (which was not according to the knowledge God had given them)—they 'did their own thing' and so they were judged by God.

When it says in v.1 that Nadab and Abihu—"...each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them"—the NIV translates 'profane fire' as "*unauthorized fire*".

The high priest was commanded to burn the incense with coals taken from the brazen altar of sacrifice (16:12), but Nadab and Abihu supplied their own fire—and God rejected it.

As Christians, we often talk about being 'on fire' for the Lord—and that's great if it isn't *unauthorized* fire.

In other words, serving and worshipping God in a way that is contrary to what He has commanded in His Word. (David putting the ark of the covenant on a cart to transport it...)

So, unacceptable worship would include—

1. The Worship of False Gods

2. The Worship of the True God in a Wrong Way

3. The Worship of the True God in a ‘Self-styled’ Way

4. The Worship of the True God in the Right Way with the Wrong Attitude

Here we finally come to where most of us evangelicals live.

We would say, “*Amen*” at those first three examples of unacceptable worship.

Yet even if we are worshiping the true God in the right way—if we are doing it with a wrong attitude our worship is still unacceptable to Him.

Malachi 1:6-8 (NLT2)

⁶ The LORD of Heaven’s Armies says to the priests: “A son honors his father, and a servant respects his master. If I am your father and master, where are the honor and respect I deserve? You have shown contempt for my name! “But you ask, ‘How have we ever shown contempt for your name?’” ⁷ “You have shown contempt by offering defiled sacrifices on my altar. “Then you ask, ‘How have we defiled the sacrifices?’” “You defile them by saying the altar of the LORD deserves no respect. ⁸ When you give blind animals as sacrifices, isn’t that wrong? And isn’t it wrong to offer animals that are crippled and diseased? Try giving gifts like that to your governor, and see how pleased he is!” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies...

In the Law, God required that His people bring to Him the best of their animals for sacrifice and offerings (worship)—but they were giving God the junk—like offering Him road kill today!

Malachi 1:13 (NLT2)

¹³ You say, ‘It’s too hard to serve the LORD [NKJV—‘what weariness’—“*O, no church again?!]*, and you turn up your noses at my commands,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies. “Think of it! Animals that are stolen and crippled and sick are being presented as offerings! Should I accept from you such offerings as these?” asks the LORD.

Do we give God our best, or do we offer Him the leftovers of our time, money, and affections?

There are consequences for getting our priorities out of whack and not putting God first—

Haggai 1:2-6, 8-11 (NLT2)

² “This is what the LORD of Heaven’s Armies says: The people are saying, ‘The time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD.’” ³ Then the LORD sent this message through the prophet Haggai: ⁴ “Why are you living in luxurious houses while my house lies in ruins? ⁵ This is what the LORD of Heaven’s Armies says: Look at what’s happening to you! ⁶ You have planted much but harvest little. You eat but are not satisfied. You drink but are still thirsty. You put on clothes but cannot keep warm. Your wages disappear as though you were putting them in pockets filled with holes!... ⁸ Now go up into the hills, bring down timber, and rebuild my house. Then I will take pleasure in it and be honored, says the LORD. ⁹ You hoped for rich harvests, but they were poor. And when you brought your harvest home, I blew it away. Why? Because my house lies in ruins, says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies, while all of you are busy building your own fine houses. ¹⁰ It’s because of you that the heavens withhold the dew and the earth produces no crops. ¹¹ I have called for a drought on your fields and hills—a drought to wither the grain and grapes and olive trees and all your other crops, a drought to starve you and your livestock and to ruin everything you have worked so hard to get.”

The word *worship* is a shortened form of the word “*worship*”—which means showing God the worth He holds in your life.

Thomas Carlyle said, “*Wonder is the basis of worship.*”

Gordon Dahl defines it this way—

“Most middle-class Americans tend to worship their work, to work at their play, and to play at their worship. As a result, their meanings and values are distorted. Their relationships disintegrate faster than they can keep them in repair and their lifestyles resemble a cast of characters in search of a plot”

Next week, we’ll finish our series which we’ve entitled—“**True Worship**”.