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WHAT CHRISTIANS SHOULD KNOW (#WCSK), PART X: WORSHIP

All Scriptures will be taken from the New American Standard Bible (NASB) unless otherwise noted. Biblical references are examples and are in no way intended to be exhaustive. Also, the series What Christians Should Know is not a complete reference but is meant to provide guidance on basic beliefs, principles and doctrines in the Christian faith. All of the lessons are best used as a general guide as you engage in your own Bible study.

“But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1).

Worship is the topic of our last lesson because everything in the Christian’s life should ultimately end at worship. Each and every thing that we do should be aimed at glorifying God. In this general sense, worship encompasses the totality of a person’s thoughts and deeds. The Hebrew word for worship is *shacah*, which means to prostrate, to pay obeisance or to bow down in the presence of a superior. God is very clear that we ought never to worship anything other than Him. The Greek word for worship is *proskuneo*, which means to fawn or crouch to, to show reverence or to adore. By implication, these definitions clarify that worship is something that we do in the presence of God when we are both aware of Him and adore Him (thought), and, thus, we glorify Him (action) through singing and praising, for example.

The aforementioned action may also involve other people and our interactions with them. For example, Colossians 3:16 says, “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” *Only God* is worthy of worship, and this is why the first of the Ten Commandments is, “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:3). Exodus 34:14 says, “For you shall not worship any other god.” Not even those beautiful, awesome and magnificent spiritual creations of God that serve Him are worthy of worship.¹ Only THE LORD is worthy to be praised and receive glory and honor because He and He alone created all things and is the first cause of everything. Revelation 4:11 says, “Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive

¹ Revelation 22:8-9

glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.” God will not give His glory to another,² and He is also a jealous God.³ This jealousy should not conjure up ideas of a crazy lover or an overly emotional and irrational person; rather, it should make us keenly aware that when we divert worship away from the place where it truly belongs, this dishonors God and insults Him. God seeks His own honor because, as I hope I have made clear in the last nine lessons, everything He has done is not only worthy of that reverence, but it is also totally unmerited by us. On top of all of that, even though God is deserving of adoration, He never forces our hand. Instead, he invites us to voluntarily worship Him. And, in that voluntary worship, we are to use our gifts to always glorify⁴ God and never glorify and bring attention to ourselves.

In the book of Isaiah, the prophet gives all human beings the meaning of life and specifically tells us why God made us: “Bring My sons from afar And My daughters from the ends of the earth, Everyone who is called by My name, *And whom I have created for My glory*, Whom I have formed, even whom I have made” (italics mine; 43:6-7). Ephesians 1:12 (NIV) says, “In order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be *for the praise of his glory*” (emphasis added).

Glory is part of the worship formula because when you worship something, you also *glorify* it and *sacrifice* to it. The root of the word *glory* refers to honor, quantity, heaviness or something’s physical weight. Hence, if you glorify something, you essentially put the “weight” and quantity of your thoughts, attention and resources into that thing—it’s the thing you consider to be the most important. Sacrifice and glory go hand in hand because if you invest all your resources in something, you find yourself taking away from something else in order to glorify “it.” We sacrifice *in order to* glorify. The ideal is to worship God and Him alone but, for example, people may worship their jobs and, consequently, put all their “weight,” time and resources into their occupations. In so doing, they *sacrifice* their health, friends, and families to bring *glory* to “it.” Romans 11:36-12:1 mentions the glory and sacrifice involved in worship: “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.”

The opposite of worshipping God is idolatry. Consequently, idolatry is worshipping anything that God created (e.g., nature, the planets, another person) or we made (e.g., an idea, a career, a lifestyle). Idolatry is an attempt to satisfy our own appetites with the objects of our choosing. That desire is never quenched because the appetite just comes back once our figurative stomachs are empty again. In Philippians 3:18-19, Paul says, “For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, *whose god is their appetite*, and whose glory is in their shame, *who set their minds on earthly things*” (emphasis added).

² Isaiah 48:11

³ Exodus 20:5

⁴ I Peter 4:11

Romans 1:25 clarifies idolatry further: “They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever.” People may scoff, thinking that because they don’t have little statues of “gods” in their houses, they can’t have idols. However, idols are everywhere. The failure to recognize idols in 21st century America comes from the fact that many forms of idolatry are deemed socially acceptable. If you’re curious about what your idols are, ask yourself a few simple questions:

- (1) What Scriptures in the Bible do I disagree with? Why?
- (2) What do I pray for or plan for the most?
- (3) Where does my money go first?
- (4) What do I center my life around?
- (5) What is the one thing I need or want the most in my life right now?

God-centered worship is characteristic of people dedicated to THE LORD. He will take drastic measures to liberate those who have been prevented from worshipping Him. This is one reason why He freed Israel from Egyptian bondage. In Exodus 7:16 (NIV), God tells Pharaoh through Moses, “The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you: Let my people go, *so that they may worship me in the wilderness*” (italics mine). In many Biblical prophecies, we get a very clear picture that one of God’s redemptive promises for all of humanity is their liberation from sin and the false idols of worship in the world so that they will be free to worship Him before His throne.⁵ Hebrews 12:22-29 depicts a heavenly scene where those who have accepted the gospel call and turned away from sin and false gods now praise and worship God as a communal body. Hence, heaven is a “church” worshipping and praising God:

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven. And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, “YET ONCE MORE I WILL SHAKE NOT ONLY THE EARTH, BUT ALSO THE HEAVEN.” This expression, “Yet once more,” denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire.

⁵ For example, Isaiah 2:2-4, 25:6-8, 66:18-21; Jeremiah 49:6

Worship is never a forced activity that produces bitterness and grumbling. Rather, sincere worship changes the worshippers so that they delight in God. In fact, if you know any people who do not enjoy worship, then they are in for a surprise because heaven is a non-stop worship fest!⁶ David, for example, wrote a large portion of the Psalms, passages intended to worship and praise God. In them, he says things such as, “One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek: / That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, / To behold the beauty of the LORD And to meditate in His temple” (27:4). He also writes, “In Your presence is fullness of joy; / In Your right hand there are pleasures forever” (16:11). In Psalm 73:25, Asaph writes, “Whom have I in heaven but You? / And besides You, I desire nothing on earth.” In other cases, those engaged in genuine worship “[d]ay by day [continued] with one mind in the temple, and [broke] bread from house to house, they [took] their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people” (Acts 2:46-47). Soon after Jesus’s ascension, the disciples returned to Jerusalem and “were continually in the temple praising God.”⁷

One of the most awe-inspiring verses in the Bible tells us that when we worship God, He, in turn, delights in us. In reference to the faithful in Zion who worship THE LORD, Isaiah 62:3-5 says:

You will also be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,
And a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
It will no longer be said to you, “Forsaken,”
Nor to your land will it any longer be said, “Desolate”;
But you will be called, “My delight is in her,”
And your land, “Married”;
For the LORD delights in you,
And to Him your land will be married.
For as a young man marries a virgin,
So your sons will marry you;
And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
So your God will rejoice over you.

Those who worship God are able to come close to Him through the atoning blood sacrifice of Jesus. Barricades and other ceremonial or legal barriers no longer separate us from God. We are now able to enter into the place where God Himself dwells, into His presence.⁸ (Of course, since God is a spiritual being, we won’t actually see THE LORD in front of us when we worship.) Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross allows us direct access to God, and so, when we are in His presence, our worship ought to be suitable. Therefore, “let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe” (Hebrews 12:28). James 4:8 says, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-

⁶ Revelation 4:8-11, 5:11-14

⁷ Luke 24:53

⁸ Hebrews 10:19

minded.” In drawing close to God, we may also “receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). In I Peter 2:5, the apostle says that those who worship in turn are “being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” As a result, even as we worship THE LORD, He does not stop giving to us.

Since worship is the primary activity of those already in Heaven, it is clear that it has great value and that value is priceless and timeless. Worship of God brings you into His presence and God thus draws closer to you, giving you the benefits just mentioned. Hence, how we use our time on earth is very, very important because when we consume our time with non-worship activities, we are not fulfilling the purpose for which God created us. Particularly in the modern era, there are endless distractions that allow us to waste time. Pay attention to what Paul says in Ephesians 5:15-20:

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, *making the most of your time*, because the days are evil. So then *do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is*. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; *always giving thanks* for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father. (Italics mine)

What Paul is essentially saying is that you should not waste your time “getting drunk” with worldly things. Rather, set your mind on Godly things and on *continuously* giving praise and thanks to God.

People worship in a physical sense, but the primary realm of worship is the *spiritual* realm. John 4:23-24 says, “But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” Worship in a general sense can involve many varieties of natural activities, but *true* worship is always a spiritual activity hidden to the human eye. For example, when Mary visited Elizabeth and was pregnant with Jesus, she praised God by saying, “My *soul* exalts the Lord, / And my *spirit* has rejoiced in God my Savior” (italics mine, Luke 1:46-47). So while Mary was praising God in a natural sense, she was also aware of a deeper act of worship in the spiritual realm. Consequently, worship *can* look like what most people would expect. Examples include people alone in their residences, lifting up their hands and praising God, or others in church, singing along with their fellow worshippers to a joyful song to THE LORD. However, since Jesus tells us that true worship is in “spirit and truth,” our global thoughts and actions are also a form of worship. Moreover, if we ought to worship *in* the truth, we also know that the Word of God *is* the truth.⁹ Therefore, learning and obeying the Word of God is also a form of worship. Furthermore,

⁹ Proverbs 30:3; Psalm 33:4; John 17:17; II Timothy 2:15; Hebrews 4:12

worshipping in the spirit nurtures the fruits of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.¹⁰

Wayne Grudem says, “Genuine worship is not something that is self-generated or that can be worked up within ourselves. It must rather be the outpouring of our hearts *in response* to a realization of who God is.”¹¹ As with everything else we have learned so far, it all begins with God. Otherwise, an atheist could begin “worshipping” God without any knowledge of who He really is. The seraphim in Isaiah 6:3 praise God due to their realization of Who He is: “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, / The whole earth is full of His glory.” In other words, knowing Who God is and truly understanding all the marvelous things Jesus has done for us inspires a sense of awe and reverence for God in us. The result is genuine worship. One example is that of Matthew 14, where the disciples see Jesus walking on water and calming the winds. Verse 33 of the text says, “[T]hose who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, ‘You are certainly God’s Son!’”

Because worship is a spiritual matter, it requires spiritual preparation (i.e. prayer), spiritual care and spiritual execution. A worship problem is, thus, a spiritual problem and requires spiritual answers. Also, before one can engage in genuine worship, he or she must reconcile any interpersonal problems¹² and family quarrels,¹³ and diligently ensure that the church has not succumbed to “roots of bitterness.”¹⁴ Genuine worship is orderly¹⁵ and is performed by those who have a pure heart¹⁶ and strive for holiness.¹⁷

And that is the end of this lesson. I hope you have learned much in this and prior lessons and wish you well in your Bible studies. I will be taking a brief break before starting *What Christians Should Know, Volume II* in a few weeks. That series will go beyond basic doctrine and clarify basic principles (e.g., election, sanctification), practices (e.g., communion and baptism), and concepts (e.g., the tabernacle). If you have any questions about this lesson or would like to suggest a topic for *WCSK II*, please email us at dlcfchurch@gmail.com Be sure to put **WCSK** (yes, all caps) in the subject line.

God Bless.

Dr. C. H. E. Sadaphal

¹⁰ Galatians 5:22-23

¹¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1011.

¹² Matthew 5:24; I Timothy 2:8; I John 4:20

¹³ I Peter 3:7

¹⁴ Hebrews 12:15

¹⁵ I Corinthians 14:33

¹⁶ Matthew 5:8; I John 3:21; c.f. James 4:8

¹⁷ Hebrews 12:14