

# Worship is a way of life

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Who can worship? Some would say that only those who have a sincere faith in Jesus Christ can worship, but when we look at scripture we see a larger idea: “Everyone worships something.” Everyone desires something more than all else. Everyone trusts something more than anything else. Everyone has a first love above anyone else. Everyone worships something.

In the scriptures we are taught that if we value or treasure anything else more than God, we are guilty of idol worship or worshipping a false god. Some would argue, “But how can God say this! We are free to worship whoever we want!” Correct, but there is no other God. There is nothing in this world or even this universe that is worthy of ultimate worship, except for the Creator and Sovereign God, who is over all things. To give ultimate worship to anything or anyone else is worshipping a false god. Now some Christians would argue that because we Christians do not bow down to statues or take part in pagan religious rituals, that we do not worship idols or false gods like the pagan people in Bible times, but are we really that much different?

Let’s consider some of the Greek and Roman gods. Aphrodite, also known by the Romans as Venus, was the goddess of love, beauty, sensuality, pleasure and procreation. Ares or Mars was the chaotic God of war. Dionysus, also known as Bacchus, was the god of wine and pleasure. Eros, also known as Cupid, was the god of love, procreation and sexual desire. Hebe, also known as Juventas, was known as the goddess of youth. Hermes, also known as Mercury, was the god of commerce and travel. Hypnos, also known as Somnus, and Morpheus were gods of sleep. Kratos was the god of strength and power. Nemesis, also known as Invidia, was the goddess of retribution and vengeance. Nike was the god of victory. Peme, also known as Fama, was the goddess of fame and gossip. Ploutus was the god of wealth. Tyche, also known as Fortuna, was the goddess of luck, fortune and prosperity. Zelus, also known as Agon, was the god of zeal, rivalry and jealousy.

We may try to distance ourselves from the worship of pagan gods, but at the level of our desires are we really that much different? Jesus said, **“Worship the lord your God and serve Him only”** Matthew 4:10. We may claim to not be idol worshippers or worshippers of false gods because we do not bow to a statue or give sacrifices to a false god, but do you see how their worship lines up with our “idolatrous”

sinful desires as well? Look back over the list. They worshipped love, beauty, sensuality, pleasure, war, wine, youth, sexual desire, travel, commerce, sleep, strength, power, retribution, vengeance, victory, fame, gossip, wealth, luck, fortune, rivalry and jealousy. That sounds like our world, and at times it even sounds like us. They worshipped all these things, are we not tempted by the same? The fact of the matter is that every person worships something, and that we all are guilty of idol worship at one time or another.

Many times, we think of music as worship, when in reality it is only an expression of worship. We see examples of a misguided “worship” often in the western church. We are drawn to the sound and the emotion, and tempted to worship the experience. We sing of what God can do for us, while not thinking of what it will demand of us. We sing with all our heart, but then walk out of the church still wanting to be the lord of our own lives. We refuse to sing a worship song because it is too old, or too “last year”, or too theological, or not my style. But all of this is showing a propensity to self-centered worship, which is not really worship at all. Our songs and sermons are only as worshipful as the lives that we live during the week. If our lives have not worshipped Christ during the week, our songs have no spiritual value on Sunday.

It would be like an employee who brings his boss her favorite coffee and a box of chocolate, but the boss knows that this employee has been sharing trade secrets with their competitors; the coffee and the chocolates will mean nothing to the boss. So it is with God when we bring a song, but it is not accompanied by an obedient life.

Our worship on Sunday is confirmed or denied by our “life of worship” during the week. Let me show you what I mean from several stories in the Bible.

In the Old Testament we find a story in 1 Samuel 15 about the nation of Israel and their first king. King Saul, along with a prophet of God named Samuel, are the two main characters in this story.

In 1 Samuel 15 God instructs the Israelites to attack and destroy a people known as the Amalekites. As one looks back through the Old Testament they will see that the Amalekites had abused and attacked the Israelites numerous times. God commands King Saul and the Israelites to attack and destroy them. To kill even their animals. To bring nothing back as rewards from battle and no one back as prisoners of war.

King Saul does attack and defeat the Amalekites, but then brings back the best animals and the king of the Amalekites. God then sends the prophet Samuel to confront King Saul about his disobedience.

Saul first responds by arguing that he had obeyed God’s instructions. He next blames the soldiers for bringing home the best of the animals. He then seeks to justify their actions by saying that the animals were brought back for the sole purpose of being sacrificed to God. In verse 22, Samuel then responds with these words, ***“Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”***

It is better to obey than sacrifice. That was God's message to Saul. Obedience is worth more in the eyes of God than spiritual rituals.

In this verse we are confronted by the fact that God is more concerned about our lives than our ritualistic worship. That does not mean that our songs, prayers, offerings, sermons and worship services are not important to God, but it does show us that worship is something more than rituals.

Matthew 5:23 supports this same truth: ***“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.”***

These verses guide us to the idea that worship is a way of life. It affects how we live. It is a life that time and again declares the worth of our God through our decisions, actions, thoughts and behaviors.

Isaiah 58:2-12 paints a very clear picture of what is demanded if worship is to be accepted by God.

God said:

***“They seek me daily and delight to know my ways, as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the judgment of their God; they ask of me righteous judgments; they delight to draw near to God.***

The people then ask:

***<sup>3</sup> ‘Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?’***

Then God responded:

***“Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. <sup>4</sup> Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high. <sup>5</sup> Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the Lord?***

***<sup>6</sup> “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? <sup>7</sup> Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? <sup>8</sup> Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. <sup>9</sup> Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’***

***If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, <sup>10</sup> if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. <sup>11</sup> And the Lord will guide you***

*continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.<sup>12</sup> And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.”*

God desires and demands a life of worship from His children. And in return we will walk in the shadow of our God. Our needs will be met. Our lives will be blessed. And as we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us (James 4:8).

Romans 12:1 holds this same standard when it says, *“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present yourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual act of worship.”* Once we choose to follow Jesus our life is not our own. We now lay down our own dreams, desires, agenda and lives on the altar of God and pick up and take upon ourselves the will of Christ.

This form of life worship is happening in our lives many times a day. The words that we say. The friends we choose. The way we spend our money. The way we treat the people with whom we live. All of this reveals what we worship and what desires rule our hearts. Let me explain.

First let's look at a list of common desires: hope, love, security, freedom, joy and peace. Now which of these would you say are sinful? None of them are sinful . . . unless we desire them more than Christ. At this point they become a false god or idol and we become idol worshippers. To worship Christ means that He sits on the throne of our hearts. He is to be our King, our chief desire, our first love.

When a common desire becomes our chief desire, it then becomes idolatrous. We then have forsaken the Provider for the provision. We have longed for the creation instead of the Creator. We have ceased to worship God and now are worshipping an idol.

These types of desires are often not seen as evil or sinful at all. Unrestrained common desires many times seem innocent, but if anything besides Christ rules our hearts, then our lives will be led in a sinful, self-centered direction. We see this key role of the heart often in Scripture. Proverbs 4:23 says, *“Guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life.”*

In Luke 6:44-45 Christ explains it this way:

*“The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.”*

To sum it up we could say, *“Whatever rules your heart will control your behavior.”*

Paul David Tripp in his book *Instrument in the Redeemer's Hands* describes it this way:

“You and I are always desiring. Desires precede, determine, and characterize everything you do. Desires get you up in the morning and put you to bed at night. Desire makes you work with discipline to get one thing done and run as hard as you can to avoid another. Desires sculpt

every relationship in your life. They are the lenses through which you examine every situation. At the foundation of all worship, whether true or false, is a heart full of desire. “

**Worship is a way of life and is constantly on display.** If Christ is the most important desire in one’s life, then everything else will respond accordingly. One’s allegiance to Christ will be apparent in one’s speech, actions, thoughts and even emotions.

Let’s consider the following situations that are situations where worship is expressed:

A Christian mother waits to pick up her children after school. While she waits, all the mothers are talking badly about one of the mothers who is not present. The mothers then turn to this Christian mother to hear her opinion of this absent mother. Her desire for approval and belonging will now compete with her desire for God’s commandments to love your neighbor, to not gossip, and to speak honorably. Her decision is an expression of worship.

You go to a bar for your morning cup of coffee. You pay with 10 euros, but are then given 18.50 euros in change. The waiter mistakenly thought that you gave them 20 euros. What will you do? Will you put the money in your pocket or will you notify the waiter of their mistake and return the money? Your desire for money and your desire for Christ and his commands for honesty and a pure heart will come against each other. Which will win? Your decision is an expression of worship.

A person neglects their daily devotional time of Bible reading and prayer because they do not have time. They do have time for video games, surfing the web, exercise, dinner with friends, and nightly television, but with all of their activities they just don’t have time to draw near to God. Their neglect of God is an expression of worship.

Christian teenage siblings continue to argue and fight on an ongoing basis. Their desire to win, to gain the upper hand, and to get their way has become stronger than their desire for Christ and His commands of reconciliation and putting others before themselves. Their fighting is an expression of worship.

Another example could be that of a single person who has had a long day at work. He is driving the commute home and begins thinking of his favorite recliner, reading a good book, peace and quiet, and a nice warm dinner. The longer he drives, the more this idea of “home” becomes his focus and desire. He parks the car, climbs the stairs up to his apartment and hears laughter and a loud television. He sees his roommate’s friends laughing and eating in his living room. He sees his roommate’s unfolded clothes in his recliner. He sees some of his groceries being used to make snacks for their “party”. He proceeds to yell at his roommate in front of his friends, and treats them with sarcasm and disregard. He then marches back out to the car, slams the door, and drives off to find some fast food.

In this situation what happened? The world would say, “It’s okay. The roommate was inconsiderate and the single person has had a long day.” The Scriptures would say that the single person’s evil desires enticed him into sin. During his drive home he had begun to long for peace, comfort, or rest. When he arrived, this desire had taken the throne of his heart, and when he did not get what he wanted he

lashed out at everyone around him. If Christ had been on the throne of his heart and his desire for peace and comfort had been secondary, then he would have submitted to Christ by treating his roommate and his friends with respect, patience, and forgiveness if needed.

Every situation with a moral dynamic to it is an occasion to worship. We express our worship by what kind of material we post on Facebook. We express worship as we decide whether to let our coworkers know that we are followers of Christ or not. We express worship in how we spend our money, how we prioritize our time, in how we discipline our children, if we keep our minds pure, how we choose our career, how we choose our words and how we choose our friends.

Every tempting situation becomes an opportunity to worship. It also becomes an opportunity to make a statement concerning God's ultimate worth. It is an opportunity of worship where we can reaffirm to ourselves and show to the world that God is more precious than anything else this world has to offer.

In summary, let's review several important truths. Everyone worships something. To obey is better than to sacrifice. The sincerity of our worship on Sunday is confirmed or denied by our "life of worship" during the week. One's allegiance to Christ will be apparent in one's speech, actions, thoughts and even emotions. Whatever desire rules your heart will control your behavior. Every situation with a moral dynamic to it is an occasion to worship.

So what do we do with our reoccurring sins and our sinful desires? We first join with the psalmist as we pray Psalm 139:23, ***"Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting!"*** Allow God to bring regret to your heart and a desire for holy change in your life. Surrender the struggle to Him, trusting that He can bring a change.

As the Holy Spirit brings conviction of sin to our hearts we confess our sins, repent and fully receive His forgiveness as we are promised in 1 John 1:9. ***"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."***

We then obey Hebrews 12:1-2, where we are instructed to ***"Throw off anything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles . . . and fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith."*** We remove from our lives anything that is leading us into sin. We then fix our eyes on Jesus by spending daily time with God through Bible reading, prayer, confession of sin, and living our lives alongside other believers who encourage us, challenge us, and move us towards Christ.

The change of our heart's desires can only be accomplished as the Holy Spirit works in our lives. As we obey these scriptures we place ourselves in the path of the Holy Spirit and God changes us, one day at a time. Much like in Ezekiel 36:26-27, ***"And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."***

May we be a people who are prepared to worship Christ every moment of every day.

## Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever had a time in your life that you felt very spiritual or near to God? How would you describe it?
2. Can you think of a worship experience that you had in a group setting that was very meaningful to you? Can you tell us about it?
3. Based on the fact that everyone worships something, what do the people in our culture seem to worship most?
4. Take a moment to read back through Isaiah 58:2-12. In a couple of sentences, what would you say that God is trying to communicate to the people who were fasting?
5. How would you explain the idea of "Worship is a way of life" in your own words?
6. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? "If our lives have not worshipped Christ during the week, our songs have very little spiritual value on Sunday." Why would you answer that way?
7. Which of the example worship situations that were given in the sermon did you relate with the most? (Read above if necessary)
8. Do you have any situations where you find it difficult to worship God through your words and actions? Can you explain?
9. What do you think God wants you to remember from this sermon?
10. What do you think God wants you to do about it?
11. Is there any way that we can help you with this?
12. How can we pray for you?