

The Necessity of Biblical Worship

Division of Graduate Studies
Northland Baptist Bible College
Sam Horn, Ph.D.

Lecture 1

The Church is the Church in her worship. Worship is not an optional extra, but is of the very life and essence of the Church. Nor is it a false groveling in the dust of the religiously minded. Man is never more truly man than when he worships God. He rises to all the heights of human dignity when he worships God, and all God's purposes in Creation and Redemption are fulfilled in us as together in worship we are renewed in and through Christ, and in the name of Christ we glorify God. So by the grace of God we see to voice for all creatures the praises of God and realize our God-given destiny to be the priests of creation under Christ our Great High Priest.

*James B. Torrence,
"The Place of Jesus Christ in Worship"
in Theological Foundations for Ministry.*

This is an age of religious activism: we greatly concern ourselves over what our churches are doing rather than what our churches are. Most Christians are too busy to worship, and many church services are so filled with manmade promotion that God is almost forgotten. People go to church to be spectators at a religious program, not participants in spiritual worship. They spend their time counting, but not weighing! As long as there are "results" nobody cares whether or not God was pleased as His people gathered to honor Him and offer Him spiritual worship. Multitudes of Christian workers (including pastors) wear themselves out on the weekly religious treadmill, gradually growing weary of soul and all the while wondering what is wrong with their spiritual lives. The end is collapse – spiritually, physically, and emotionally. The missing ingredient is worship – ascribing to God worth and not "using God" to promote the results we have already planned.

Warren W. Wiersbe

We leave our places of worship, and no deep and inexpressible wonder sits on our faces. We can sing these lilting melodies; and when we get out into the streets our faces are one with the faces of those who have left the theaters and music halls. There is nothing about us to suggest that we've been looking at anything stupendous and overwhelming. Far back in my boyhood I remember an old saint telling me that after some services he liked to make his way back home alone by quiet paths, so that the hush of the Almighty might remain on his awed and prostrated soul. This is the element we are missing.

J. H. Jowett

Whenever in the church biblical authority has been lost, Christ has been displaced, the gospel has been distorted, or faith has been perverted, it has always been for one reason: our interests have displaced God's and we are doing His work in our way. The loss of God's centrality in the life of today's church is common and lamentable. It is this loss

that allows us to transform worship into entertainment, gospel preaching into marketing, believing into technique, being good into feeling good about ourselves, and faithfulness into being successful. AS a result, God, Christ, and the Bible have come to mean too little to us and rest too inconsequentially upon us.

*James Montgomery Boice
Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia*

Missions in not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't . . . Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.

John Piper

Introduction:

Worship has become the new topic of theological discussion in contemporary American Evangelicalism. Seminars abound on every hand dispensing new ideas and suggestions for a new and improved worship. Books and articles have exploded on the scene articulating every conceivable variation of worship.

On the surface, it might seem a positive thing that worship has come to the forefront of Evangelical thinking. After all is it not the business of the Church to worship corporately? Is it not the aim and duty of the Christian in personal worship to render through his daily life acceptable worship and service to God?

On the one hand we should be thankful that the Church has turned her attention again to the primacy of worship. On the other, we should be concerned that the worship the Contemporary Church espouses be worship that is acceptable to God. Worship is not about us but about Him and therefore, as both the source and the object of true worship, God mandates and merits proper worship. It is not enough that we turn our interest to worship. Nor is it sufficient to talk and discuss worship, even in a setting such as this. At the end of the day we must in fact worship and we must do so acceptably in the sight of Him whom we worship.

We are by nature worshippers. We will worship something or someone. Left to ourselves we will end up worshipping the wrong object and/or worshipping in wrong ways.¹ Since this is true, any profitable discussion about worship must start by observing that man is a worshipper and that he is necessarily such rather than accidentally or incidentally. There is no such thing as an accidental worshipper. Furthermore the profit to any such discussion will be derived not from the above observation in isolation

¹ J. Ligdon Duncan III observed, "Humanity, having been created in God's image, and with a sense of deity indelibly written on its heart, is inescapably religious. However, since the fall, our tendency is to attempt to create God in our own image and thus worship ourselves rather than the one in whose image we were made." "Foundations for Biblically Directed Worship" in Philip G. Ryken, ed., *Give Praise to God* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2003), 59.

(however true the observation might be) but rather in its connection to the Scriptures. It is not sufficient to be interested in worship, to discuss worship, or even to engage in worship. We must do so acceptably and what constitutes acceptable worship can only be discovered in God's revelation, the Bible.

So at the onset we must be committed to more than just the concept that worship is necessary. We must go farther and commit ourselves radically and wholeheartedly to a certain kind of worship – acceptable worship. And that worship will of necessity be biblical.

The purpose of our introductory time together is to explore why this is so. Why is biblical worship necessary? Of the many reasons that could be given, we will focus on four that are primary.

I. Biblical Worship is necessary because God Merits and Mandates It

We must immediately understand that biblical worship exists because God is. Without God there would be no biblical worship. Since God is who He is and has acted as He has acted in His universe, worship is the necessary response by all His creation. This is especially true for that part of His creation created in His image. God is the ultimate object of any form or expression of worship that is biblical. Worship directed to any other object is idolatry and inherently false.

A. His Worth Merits our Worship (Exodus 15:1-21)²

Exodus 15:1 Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and said, "I will sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea. ² "The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation; This is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will extol Him. ³ "The LORD is a warrior; The LORD is His name. ⁴ "Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea; And the choicest of his officers are drowned in the Red Sea. ⁵ "The deeps cover them; They went down into the depths like a stone. ⁶ "Your right hand, O LORD, is majestic in power, Your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy. ⁷ "And in the greatness of Your excellence You overthrow those who rise up against You; You send forth Your burning anger, and it consumes them as chaff. ⁸ "At the blast of Your nostrils the waters were piled up, The flowing waters stood up like a heap; The deeps were congealed in the heart of the sea. ⁹ "The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; My desire shall be gratified against them; I will draw out my sword, my hand will destroy them.' ¹⁰ "You blew with Your wind, the sea covered them; They sank like lead in the mighty waters. ¹¹ "Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises, working wonders? ¹² "You stretched out Your right hand, The earth

² Much of the material in this section can be found in William J. McRae series of expositions on Exodus. Of particular help is his article, "The Nature of True Worship" in *Emmaus Journal* 6:2 (Win 97) pp. 224-233. McRae served as the chancellor of Ontario Bible College and Seminary.

swallowed them.¹³ "In Your lovingkindness You have led the people whom You have redeemed; In Your strength You have guided them to Your holy habitation.¹⁴ "The peoples have heard, they tremble; Anguish has gripped the inhabitants of Philistia.¹⁵ "Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed; The leaders of Moab, trembling grips them; All the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away.¹⁶ "Terror and dread fall upon them; By the greatness of Your arm they are motionless as stone; Until Your people pass over, O LORD, Until the people pass over whom You have purchased.¹⁷ "You will bring them and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance, The place, O LORD, which You have made for Your dwelling, The sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established.¹⁸ "The LORD shall reign forever and ever."¹⁹ For the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his horsemen went into the sea, and the LORD brought back the waters of the sea on them, but the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea.²⁰ Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took the timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dancing.²¹ Miriam answered them, "Sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; The horse and his rider He has hurled into the sea." (NASB)

The background to this song is the victory Yahweh has achieved over the Egyptian army and the deliverance of Moses and His chosen people. Moses and the people sang this song in response to God's action on their behalf and against His enemies.

This is the first act of corporate worship³ rendered to God by His people after their deliverance and it contains several important truths related to worship which will be instructive to worshippers in every dispensation.

1. The participants in this worship

It is immediately noted for the reader that the participants are God's chosen and redeemed people. Moses and the nation are the recipients of God's gracious and powerful deliverance. This deliverance came because God had chosen them as His special possession and had initiated a divine relationship that was unique to them.

Interestingly, the song immediately connects this delivered people with the patriarchs (son of Israel, v 1; My father's God, v 2) and thereby clearly identifies them as recipients of God's covenant and legitimate participants in relationship to Yahweh and thereby uniquely qualified to worship.

³ There certainly were acts of worship performed by the patriarchs so this is by no means the first time worship occurred. Nor was it the first time more than one person engaged in worship. For example, it is clearly implied that the patriarchs led their families in worship. If one considers Job a patriarch, he worshipped with and on behalf of his family. However, this is the first act of corporate worship rendered by Israel after having been redeemed and as God's people.

While it is certainly true that this song demonstrates the appropriate response to God's deliverance (ascribing worship to God), it does so after first identifying exactly who the participants/worshippers were – Moses and the sons of Israel.

Furthermore, this relationship was not just a distant hereditary one but a dynamic and personal one.⁴ Moses and the people identify the Lord as their God (v 2) and He has acted in ways that clearly indicate the existence of a special relationship between Himself and these people. It is precisely because of this relationship that the people have both cause and right to render worship.

Finally, this worship is both voluntary and glad. It is the necessary, appropriate, and natural response by a people who have been chosen and delivered by God.

2. The subject and object of this worship

This act of worship was sung to God and it was about God. God is both the recipient of their glad worship (I will sing to the Lord, v 1; This is my God and I will praise Him, v 2) and at the same time the subject of their worship (The Lord is my strength and my song and He has become my salvation, v 2). They are singing to God about God! This is biblical worship in its purest form.

Biblical worship then must be offered by qualified people existing in a dynamic and personal relationship with God. Further, it must be directed

⁴ Ronald B. Allen places this song as an early psalm functioning as a declaration of praise. "God is praised in the psalms, both for who he is and for what he does. Those psalms that praise God for his essential goodness and majestic power are called Psalms of Descriptive Praise (Psalm 113). Those psalms that praise God for specific answers to prayer, or in response to marvels one has experienced at his hand, are called Psalms of Declarative Praise (Psalm 40). Exodus 15 is a Psalm of Declarative Praise. The people who sang that day were not singing in a general way about vague notions of a distant deity. They were singing in a focused manner on the topic of the very real marvels that God had done for them in their very midst. They looked at the water in terror. They shivered at the thought of the mountains which hemmed them in, against the waters. They screamed in terror at the approach of the Egyptians with their powerful chariots. They looked at spouses and children. They wept. They despaired. Then they were delivered! They were the ones who saw the waters blown on one side and then on the other. They were the ones who walked where waters once had ruled. They were the ones who stood with their loved ones on the distant shore. They were the ones who had observed as their enemies were drowned in the resurgent waters. Thus they sang: 'You blew with Your wind, / The sea covered them; / They sank like lead in the mighty waters' (Exodus 15:10)." Allen goes on to apply this observation to the modern church by observing, "Only the redeemed can sing songs of redemption. What point would this song of Israel be in the mouths of Moabites or Edomites? Similarly, of what value are the words of songs of our redemption when sung by the lost? What value is the blood of Christ to the secularist? What meaning is there in the cross for one who has no love of God? Redemption songs can be sung in praise to God only by those who have experienced his redemption. Such songs from unredeemed are merely verbal clutter." "Worship in the Psalms: Exodus 15 and the Praise of God Part Two" in *Reformation and Revival* 9:3 (Summer 2000) pp. 114-115.

to God – He must be the recipient of their glad worship. Finally, God is the subject of all true worship.

The 21 verses that make up this song are all about God and what He has done. Even a cursory reading of the text leaves the reader in awe of a God who can do the kinds of things Yahweh performed effortlessly on behalf of his people.

God was much more than just a distant deity who was receiving the technical and traditional praise of a group of people who happened to chose to worship him. All of the pagan nations around Israel had chosen what gods they would honor and serve and who they would credit for any successes or deliverances in the affairs and conflicts of life. This is a much different picture. God here is seen as having chosen and delivered them and therefore on that basis He is their God. Nor did it end there with the recognition of His deliverance. He was also their delight – their song.

3. The reason and intent of this Worship

The occasion for this worship is seen against the backdrop of God’s deliverance of Israel by destroying the pursuing Egyptian army.⁵ In the opening sentence of the song, Moses sets forth the reason for this act of worship as God’s exalted status in His universe.

Contemporary Evangelical worship is incredibly narcissistic and obsessed with its needs and experiences. It is interesting that Moses sets the reason for this song as something other than the deliverance they had received from God. What is set forth as the specific reason for the song is the fact that God is highly exalted (I will sing to the Lord, for/because He is highly exalted). He was not worthy of Israel’s worship simply or even primarily because He had accomplished a great deliverance for them, although that was certainly included in their grateful worship. The reason for this worship however is not attributed primarily to what God has done for His people but to who God is in Himself. It is that He is highly exalted that merits this worship and He would merit this worship whether or not the deliverance had been carried out in this way.

Modern worshippers tend to stress what God has done and how He has blessed them or how they have benefited as primary reasons for worship.

⁵Allen observed, “The first Psalm of the Bible is a Psalm of Moses and it is not in the Book of Psalms at all. It has pride of place in the Book of Exodus, following immediately on the conclusion of the greatest event in the course of Hebrew Scripture, God’s redemption of his people, Israel, from the land of Egypt. The prose account is in Exodus 14; the resultant Psalm of Praise is found in Exodus 15. There are thus ‘two witnesses’ to this most significant event.” “Worship in the Psalms: Exodus 15 and the Praise of God” in *Reformation And Revival* 9:2 (Spring 2000) p. 106. He further notes that Moses was the first one to write poetry/songs for Israel’s corporate worship. In addition to this psalm (Exodus 15) he also penned the Psalm of Moses (Dt. 32), the Blessing of Moses (Dt. 33), and the Complaint of Moses (Ps 90).

Moses instructs us that the primary reason for our glad and voluntary worship is that God in Himself is highly exalted and thus worthy of our worship apart from any gracious benefit He extends to us.

So the reason for the song is God's exalted nature – He is worthy of praise. But the intent of the song is to extol Him and to render Him appropriate praise (v 2).⁶

Moses and the people were primarily interested in setting forth a right view of God and His great acts rather than focusing on how those great acts benefited them. In other words, as one reads the words of the song, he is impressed with the greatness and the power of God over all His enemies rather than on the blessed status of the people. Moses wanted the people to see God's greatness rather than focus on their benefits, although those benefits are not unimportant and there is a place for grateful thanksgiving for such benefits in worship.

So biblical worship is directed to God and has as its primary intent the setting forth of a proper view of God and His works. This was accomplished by carefully constructing the content of this song of worship so that represented God accurately and attractively.

4. The content of this worship

The content of this song/psalm can be summarized as praise to God. Moses and the people are praising God for three primary observations they have made about Yahweh.

First, they are praising Him for being greater than Pharaoh and the armies of Egypt (15:2-10). This superiority was evident in the deliverance from Pharaoh that Yahweh obtained for His people. This is evident as they sing about God effecting their salvation or deliverance (v 2). Yahweh's exalted greatness is further demonstrated in His devastating and total destruction of Pharaoh and his army. Pharaoh had lifted himself up against Yahweh early on by issuing the challenge to Moses, "*Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?*" (Exodus 5:2). Even after 10 graphic, violent object lessons designed to help Pharaoh understand and recognize God's superior position over him, Pharaoh continued in arrogance stating, "*I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; My desire shall be gratified against them; I will draw out my sword, my hand shall destroy them*" (v 9).

⁶ The term for praise used here is פָּאָרַס which means to make beautiful or to adorn. Moses is concerned in this song to adorn God properly or to cause God to be seen as beautiful in the eye of the reader. Our worship should likewise include this element – an intentional effort to make God attractive in the sight of other. In the content of his song, Moses accomplishes this by helping the reader come to a right view of who God is and what He is like. We make God attractive in worship when our worship reflects an accurate picture of God's nature and His work.

Against the backdrop of Pharaoh's arrogance and self-perceptions of greatness Moses portrays God's superiority in very real and tangible ways. It is Yahweh who cast Pharaoh's chariots and army into the sea. He overthrew the best and finest of Pharaoh's officers. His right hand shattered the enemy. He consumed them as chaff with His righteous anger. He blew the wind that caused the waters to overwhelm the Egyptian army and their proud leader. In the end Pharaoh has foolishly challenged God and God has easily, evidently, and everlastingly demonstrated His superiority. And, because of this, glad and thankful worship was offered up by those He had delivered and who could now personally attest to His superiority and greatness.

Second, Yahweh is to be worshipped in praise because He is greater and superior to all other "gods" in the world (15:11-17). Moses initiates this aspect by asking the rhetorical question "Who is like thee among the gods, O Lord?" (v 11). The obvious and clear answer is, "No one!" His majestic holiness surpasses that of the deities of any of the surrounding nations. His wonder-working power is greater than any other (v 11). No other god exhibits the loving-kindness that He has exhibited toward His people (v 13). No other deity has the strength and the ability to control the fate of nations yet to come! Moses mentions Philistia, Edom, Moab, and Canaan and predicts with certainty what God will do to them in the future.⁷

Third, Yahweh is to be worshipped in praise because of His gracious acts on behalf of His chosen people. His loving-kindness or loyal love will cause Him to lead the people that He has redeemed to an appointed place of worship. This place would be in a land that He would give them and specifically on a mountain that He had ordained as the proper place where acceptable worship could be rendered by them to Him. Here in this song is the foreshadowing of not just the promised land but of the entire worship system prescribed by God Himself, carried out in the confines of a central worship place designed by God Himself (the temple), situated in a location chosen by God Himself (Jerusalem).

Clearly, God is to be worshipped for all the reasons expressly stated above as well as for a host of others not immediately mentioned here by Moses. However, there are reminders and indicators that the people who were worshipping here were worshipping a God who was very particular and precise about every aspect of their worship. It was not enough that they worship sincerely, thankfully, gladly, and freely. The content of their worship mattered and so did the place and manner of their worship. In the chapters that follow God delivered precise instructions about who, what,

⁷ Moses may be employing perfect tense verbs in verses 14-17 as prophetic futures in order to show the certainty of what God will do in the future by describing these future events as though they had already taken place.

where, and how this nation was to worship. Worship offered outside those boundaries was not only unacceptable, it constituted idolatry and would receive God's severest judgment. God, whose power and wrath against those that displeased Him had been powerfully displayed in destroying the Egyptians, was not a God to be worshipped casually or treated lightly.

5. The transcendence of this worship

At the heart of this song was praise to God for who He is. But there is also thankful praise for what He had done here for Israel and for what He would do for them in the future. Moses and the people offered praise to Yahweh for being their strength, their song, and their salvation (v 2). This verse is quoted in two other important OT passages: Psalm 118:14 and Isaiah 12:2. The three references containing this statement are related to three great events in the over-arching program of God.⁸

First, the reference here in Exodus 15 points back to the most significant event in Israel's history as a nation – the Exodus. The theological implications of the Exodus are beyond the scope of this study but clearly it became the central underlying theme of God's future dealings with Israel. Their physical deliverance from the oppression and bondage of Egypt would provide a constant and memorable picture of the greater deliverance from spiritual bondage that one greater than Moses would accomplish. This exodus as great and historic as it was would only be a foreshadowing of the true and eternal exodus that was yet to come.

Second, the reference in Psalm 118:14 is set in context of the suffering of Messiah and the strength that would be given to him by God. Interestingly, some commentators have observed that Christ would have sung this very psalm as a part of the Passover liturgy on the eve of his death.⁹ The point is that these words sung in worship by Moses here in Exodus would be the very words the Psalmist would place in the mouth of Messiah, on the evening before he would fulfill literally all that the exodus event had described symbolically.

Third, Isaiah 12:2 is the final reference containing the quotation from Exodus 15:2. Isaiah is clearly speaking of the millennial kingdom and the rule of Messiah in chapter 11. Chapter 12 begins by identifying the time frame for the events of the chapter as being "in that day" (12:1) – the day or time referred to in chapter 11. Not only would these words of worship point to the very real and present physical deliverance from Egypt, they would point to two greater events that would transcend Moses and the

⁸ This outline was suggested and has been developed by Walter Kaiser Jr. in his commentary on Exodus in the *Expositor's Bible Commentary*.

⁹ For a brief but informative discussion of this psalm as part of the Passover *Haggadah* see Ronald Allen, "Worship in the Psalms Part Two" in *RAR* 9:3 (Summer 2000) p. 111.

original worshippers in Exodus. Those two great events would be the first advent of Messiah where He would accomplish the work of redemption by His death on the cross and His second advent where He would accomplish the promises made to Abraham and his descendants in the establishment of a kingdom over which He would rule personally.

And so because of who He is – His worth – God merits and mandates the corporate worship of His people in ways and words that are prescribed by Him, directed to Him, and about Him. This was true in Moses day as well as in David’s and Isaiah’s day. It continues to be true for all of God’s people today.

God merits and mandates our worship because of His worth. But He also merits worship for a second reason.

B. His Work Merits Worship (Revelation)¹⁰

Having examined the first place where corporate worship takes place, we now turn our attention to the final and ultimate mention of corporate worship in the Bible as seen in the book of Revelation.

Even the most casual reading of Revelation reveals worship as a central motif. Clearly, John is concerned that the churches who receive his writing worship correctly starting with the object and subject of biblical worship. Nowhere in all of scripture (with the possible exception of Hebrews) is a Triune God more clearly presented as the subject, the object, and the agent of all true Biblical worship. God the Father receives the worship of the seraphim and the gathered angelic host as well as that of the 24 elders gathered in His presence. At the center of this worship offered to the Father is the work accomplished by His Son, Jesus Christ.¹¹ All worship is seen as empowered and made possible by the third member of the Godhead – the Holy Spirit.

In the structure of the book there are five clear reasons in addition to His nature¹² that explain to the reader why God merits biblical worship from His people. These reasons are introduced by a linguistic device known as a “purpose clause.”

¹⁰ Much of the material in this section can be found in fuller form in an article by Mazie Nakhro entitled “The Manner of Worship According to the Book of Revelation” in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158:630 (Apr 01).

¹¹ Everything for which God the Father is praised is also true of the Son in this section of Revelation. The Father is praised as worthy of three things: glory, honor, and power (4:11). The Son is praised for being worthy of seven things: power, riches, wisdom, might, honor, glory, and blessing (5:12). As if to bring things to a climax, John records a four-fold praise offered to both the Father and the Son for being worthy of: blessing, honor, glory, and eternal dominion (5:13). Nakhro, *BSac* 158:630 (Apr 01), pp. 170-171.

¹² Nakhro observes this in the following paragraph describing the manner of worship presented in Revelation. “The first ascription of praise in heaven comes from the living creatures who declare, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come’ (4:8). This ascription of praise by these heavenly beings emphasizes the essence of God’s divine nature. His being is the foundation for all His deeds. So before declaring what He does, the living creatures praise Him for who He is. *BSac* 158:630 (Apr 10) p. 170.

1. His work of Creation (Revelation 4:11)

*"Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; **for** You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created."*

In this passage John states that God is worthy to receive glory and honor and power and as such is worthy of biblical worship. He goes on in the second half of the verse to reveal one of the reasons God is worthy of such honor and glory. Because He has created and sustained all of creation. As Creator-God He is the source and the sustainer of everything that exists. As Creator He stands above and is greater than anything in His creation and as such is worthy of the glad, free, and acceptable worship of everything and everyone in His creation. This is specifically seen in the concept that everything exists by His will and for His purposes.

2. His work of Redemption (Revelation 5:9)

*And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; **for** You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation."*

A second cause or reason for worship mentioned in Revelation is the finished work of redemption accomplished by the Lamb – God the Son. His redemptive work is mentioned elsewhere in the book (1:5; 5:12; 7:14; 12:11; 13:8; 14:3-4) but this passage specifically mentions His work of redemption as a reason for worship and depicts the 24 elders rendering acceptable corporate worship that is centered on this very point.¹³

3. His work of Sovereign Rulership (Revelation 11:15-17)

*Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever."¹⁶ And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God,¹⁷ saying, "We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, **because** You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign."*

¹³ This passage actually presents the 24 elders magnifying Christ for four specific aspects of His redemptive work. First, his death. Second, his death accomplished a redemption that was global in scope (of every kindred, tongue, and nation). Third, His work of redemption would result in them becoming a kingdom of priests (5:10). Finally, because of their redeemed status, they would reign with Him in the millennial kingdom (5:10). Nakhro, *BSac* 158:630 (Apr 01) p. 167.

Christ's right to rule has never been in question but it has been challenged by the nations and the god of this world. John uses past tense verbs to describe the certainty of an event that has not yet been completed. In other words, so sure is Christ's coming rule that the Elders ascribe worship as though it were an accomplished fact – and in God's economy, it was and is an accomplished fact.

This text makes the Lord's sovereign ruler-ship a specific cause for worship. Not only are His people to render glad and acceptable worship to God because He is the creator, and to His Son because He is their redeemer. They are to render Him worship as the rightful ruler over the world of men. The world, currently under the domination of a robber-prince, will one day be turned over to its rightful king – Christ!

The reality of this prospect is enough to cause the 24 elders to prostrate themselves in adoration and worship to Christ even though the events are still future.

God's right to rule over His creation and over our lives should not be a thing to be feared, resisted, or tolerated. Rather, because of who Christ is – a loving and righteous sovereign – it should be the motivation for our glad and thankful worship. We should join the 24 elders and say "We give thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who wast, because Thou has taken they great power hast begun to reign."

4. His work of Righteous Judgment (Revelation 14:7)

*And he said with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give Him glory, **because** the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters."*

A fourth reason for glad worship relates to the reverence and fear that should accompany all true and biblical worship. While Christ our Redeemer is indeed the Lamb of God, He is also the Lion of Judah who will bring righteous and devastating judgment on those who oppose Him.

John clearly connects the rendering of proper worship to the righteous judgment of God throughout the book (15:4; 16:5; 19:2). God is to be feared and glory given to Him because He alone is holy (15:4), He is the King of the nations (15:3), and his righteousness is seen in His judgment upon His enemies. In fact, He is to be called righteous and holy precisely because He has judged the wicked and not simply ignored their rebellion (16:5-6).¹⁴

¹⁴ Nahkro has an interesting translation of these verses. "Thus the two verses could be translated this way: 'You are just, you who are and who were, O Holy One, *because* you have delivered this judgment.

Such a God is to be held in great reverence and respect (fear) and should rightly be worshipped. However, He must be worshipped on His terms rather than ours and for His pleasure and glory rather than our enjoyment.

5. His work of Consummation (Revelation 19:7-9)

*"Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, **for** the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." ⁸ It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. ⁹ Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God."*

A fifth and final reason for the glad worship of His saints is His marriage to His people.¹⁵ Whether ones sees this as Yahweh fulfilling His promises to be a husband to Israel (Isa. 54:5; Jer. 3:1-14; Ezk. 16:8-14; Hos. 2:19-20) or Christ as the bridegroom to the Church (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:21-33)¹⁶ what is clear is that is the occasion for both rejoicing and worship! An observation clearly intended by John is that worship is to be offered carefully given who we are worshipping but it is also to be the occasion for great joy and celebration given what He has invited us to partake of – marriage with Him!

C. His Word Mandates and Regulates our Worship (Psalm 19; Exodus 24)

Since biblical worship is fundamentally about rendering acceptable praise and service to God on account of His nature (who He is) and His works (what He has done), then worship must be significant (intelligible and informed) in the mind of the worshipper. By this we mean that in order to render appropriate and acceptable biblical worship, the worshipper must possess at least two things:

First, he must possess accurate information about God.

Second, he must possess a personal knowledge or relationship with God. These two reasons mandate that true and accurate biblical worship be driven and regulated by God's self-revelation. There are many biblical passages that support this observation but for the purposes of this study there are two primary ones we will examine.

Because they poured out the blood of God's dedicated ones and of the prophets, you have given them blood to drink. They well deserve it." *BSac* 158:630 (Apr 01) p. 169.

¹⁵ "As important as judgment was and is, it is preliminary to the final phase of redemption. Judgment casts aside the unsuitable fish (Matthew 13:47-50) and blows away the chaff (Matthew 3:12; 13:30), but that is not the goal of history; God's union with his people is." Tom Wells, "The Book of Revelation and the Subject of Worship" in *Reformation and Revival* 9:3 (Summer 2000) p. 107.

¹⁶ Given the whole tenor of the Lamb imagery associated with Christ in Revelation and Christ clearly presented as the Bridegroom for the Church, it seems to me that the Church and not Israel is in view here.

1. Psalm 19

The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. ² Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge. ³ There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard. ⁴ Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their utterances to the end of the world. In them He has placed a tent for the sun, ⁵ Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber; It rejoices as a strong man to run his course. ⁶ Its rising is from one end of the heavens, And its circuit to the other end of them; And there is nothing hidden from its heat. ⁷ The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. ⁸ The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. ⁹ The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether. ¹⁰ They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. ¹¹ Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward. ¹² Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults. ¹³ Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins; Let them not rule over me; Then I will be blameless, And I shall be acquitted of great transgression. ¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.

A thorough exegetical treatment of this text is beyond the scope of this study. However, the following observations are in order.

First, this Psalm has as its primary theme the self-revelation of Yahweh.

Second, this revelation is given in two forms: generally through the creation, and specifically through the Scriptures.

Third, the general revelation from creation is seen as announcing God's presence and His power. This announcement is continual (are telling, v. 1), constant (day to day, v. 2), transcending all language and cultures (no speech, no words, no spoken language, v 3), expansive and comprehensible (through out the whole earth, the message is heard to the end of the world, v. 4), and powerfully clear (illustrated by the daily rising and setting of the sun (v. 5).

Fourth, general revelation is insufficient to reveal anything about the person and character of this powerful and existing God. In the first six verses the Psalmist uses the term "Elohim" for God to stress God's power and His ability to care for (provide and protect) and govern (control and direct) His universe. However in order to know anything more about this powerful and present deity, more specific revelation is required. This is

particularly significant for those in His creation who desire to render acceptable words and praise to Him (v. 14).

Fifth, the second half of the Psalm discusses the second and more specific form of God's self-revelation – the Law of the Lord. In this section the Psalmist is going to specifically identify this revelation both as the "Law of the Lord." This construction reminds the reader that this revelation comes from God and at the same time is about God.

Sixth, this special revelation from God has as its primary objective the initiation of a relationship between God the Creator and Man, the fallen image-bearer. This is seen both in the use of the personal and relational name for God, Yahweh, that occurs in this section of the Psalm, as well as by the direct reference to God as a personal redeemer at the end of the Psalm (v. 14).

Seventh, this special revelation is described by seven titles and corresponding characteristics and its right use will produce corresponding transformation in the worshipper's life (vv. 7-10). Additionally it serves to guide and protect the worshipper from the wrath and displeasure of God that comes from sin and transgression (vv. 10-13). For these reasons this self-revelation is necessary, valuable, and pleasant to those that rightly receive it and are instructed by it.

Finally, it is by means of understanding and incorporating this self-revelation that a man's thoughts and words will be acceptable before God. This has direct implications for our worship both private and corporate.

All genuine and acceptable biblical worship must be informed worship that is rendered on the basis of who God is (His character) and what He has done for His people (His work). This work includes but goes far beyond God's creative acts. The implication of this passage is that what is in view is the relationship to God that stands as the premise for His acts or work on their behalf. It is interesting that the Scriptures in general present God's knowing of His people as a prior fact to any redemptive work done by God on their behalf. Here the Psalmist first affirms that Yahweh is his personal God (my rock) and then announces that Yahweh is also his personal redeemer (v. 14).

2. Exodus 24¹⁷

Then He said to Moses, "Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel, and you shall worship at a distance."² "Moses alone, however, shall come near to the LORD, but they

¹⁷ The material in this section was drawn in large part from John W. Hilber, "Theology of Worship in Exodus 24" in *JETS* 39:2 (June 1996) pp. 178-189.

*shall not come near, nor shall the people come up with him."*³ Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!"⁴ Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel.⁵ He sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the LORD.⁶ Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar.⁷ Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!"⁸ So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."⁹ Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel,¹⁰ and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself.¹¹ Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they saw God, and they ate and drank.¹² Now the LORD said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and remain there, and I will give you the stone tablets with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction."¹³ So Moses arose with Joshua his servant, and Moses went up to the mountain of God.¹⁴ But to the elders he said, "Wait here for us until we return to you. And behold, Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a legal matter, let him approach them."¹⁵ Then Moses went up to the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain.¹⁶ The glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud.¹⁷ And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain top.¹⁸ Moses entered the midst of the cloud as he went up to the mountain; and Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

The narrative contained in this periscope is set in the context of the corporate worship of Israel. After experiencing God's deliverance and witnessing His victory over the Egyptian army at the Red Sea, Moses and the people journey to the mountain where God had instructed them to come in order to worship Him (5:1; 7:16; 8:1, 20, 27; 9:1, 13; 10:3, 9, 25; 12:31ff;). After three months of traveling they arrived at the base of Mt. Sinai. There Moses alone ascended the mountain and received both instructions and promises from Yahweh to deliver to the people He had redeemed from Egypt (Ex. 19-23). God promised that He would make this nation His special people and appoint them to be a "kingdom of priests" representing Him to all the nations. He also gave them laws,

statutes, judgments, and ordinances in order to instruct them in how to live before Him and serve Him acceptably.

Chapter 24 stands at the center of this instruction and covenant making process. God has revealed His gracious intent for this nation and He has given them a gracious law by which to live before Him and serve Him acceptably. He has also provided the means by which their sins are to be dealt with. The climax of all of this gracious instruction and provision is the invitation by God for Moses and the people to draw near. This chapter contains several important observations related to acceptable biblical worship.

First, the worship process starts with God and not with Man. Immediately the reader is struck with the fact that God initiates and issues the invitation. Not even Moses presumes to enter into this sacred space where God has already revealed Himself apart from God's invitation. This reiterates what Exodus has already revealed – Worship is God's idea and not Man's. Furthermore, since worship exists by God and for God, it must be done at His invitation and in accordance with His directions.

Second, Worship is the responsibility of a redeemed community in response to both God's redemptive activity on their behalf as well as His revealed will for their lives. This chapter comes after the exodus event and the events narrated here occur after the instructions of the covenant have been given by God to Moses but before they are ratified. Twice in this account Moses recounts all that the Lord has instructed and commanded and the people respond corporately by making a solemn vow to the Lord consisting of the words, "All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do!" (v 3, 7)

Third, the instructions and commandments from God were written down (v 4) and preserved for the people. This alerts us to the fact that God's instructions here were to have broader application than for just the immediate moment. In other words, they were to guide all of Israel's corporate worship experiences, not just this one event. Furthermore, Moses clearly is emphasizing that something other than the people themselves (their feelings or ideas) was shaping their corporate worship. Worship for Israel was to be derived from God and was to be driven and directed by His instructions preserved and written down in His Word. Finally, the instructions were to be repeated. That they were read twice here in the space of a few verses is not due to the forgetfulness of the people but rather for theologically driven reasons. The first recounting took place after Moses received the initial invitation. The people vowed a vow of agreement and Moses recorded God's instructions and their

response. The second recounting took place in response to the re-reading of the written account and after the cleansing of the people.¹⁸

Fourth, spiritual cleansing provided by God and done according to God's directives is a prerequisite to acceptable worship. Before the people could render acceptable worship and in preparation for such worship, spiritual cleansing had to transpire in their lives. This cleansing was provided by God and directed by God through a blood sacrifice administered by the hand of an appointed mediator. The implications for worship both ancient and modern are obvious.

Fifth, Israel's corporate worship was to be Word-centered. Throughout this passage and in this context, Israel is to give careful attention to the place of God's law, His Word, would have in their worship. For three chapters Moses has been recounting for the reader the specific content of the "Book of the Covenant." He will resume the recounting in chapter 25.¹⁹ However, here in the midst of the recounting is a central worship experience that stresses the experiential and relational aspects of worship and at the heart of this glad worship stands the Word God has given.

Sixth, the structure of the passage is set up to teach five important truths essential to Israel's worship: 1) God's presence is the privilege of worship. Note that the people were allowed to enter this presence but at a different level than Moses and the 70 elders. The 70 elders were allowed to draw closer than the multitude but only Moses was allowed intimate access. Israel was reminded that the proper worship of Yahweh involved entering into His presence and that was not something to be assumed or presumed upon. Rather it was to be done reverently and only after appropriate life cleansing and preparation had taken place. 2) This experience of God's presence was only possible if one came by means of God's provision – a sacrifice. God not only demanded the sacrifice but provided the necessary instructions by which this sacrifice could be obtain. Israel was presented with an impossible aspiration apart from the direct intervention from the direct intervention of God undertaking to make this possible. Since worship is of God and for God it should not surprise us to discover here that it is also by an exclusive means that He

¹⁸ This was not the first time the people had heard God's words and responded accordingly. Moses had recounted God's gracious promises in chapter 19 to which the people had responded "We will do everything the Lord has said." (v 8) God received their vow with pleasure and observed, "Everything they said was good. Oh that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commandments always." (Dt. 5:28-29). For a fuller discussion on the relationship between these two texts see Walter Kaiser's commentary on Exodus in the *Expositor's Bible Commentary*.

¹⁹ Kaiser notes, "The final sixteen chapters of Exodus center on the theology of the worship of God. The only interruption of this theme is the episode of the golden calf (chs. 32-34). But this section only contrasts the divinely appointed worship established in connection with the tabernacle with humanly devised worship that adores the work of human hands and leads to debauchery. The sheer amount of text devoted to the topic of worship ought to demonstrate its importance." "Exodus" in *Expositors Bible Commentary*.

has both arranged and provided. 3) Covenant relationship is the prerequisite to acceptable worship. Only those who enjoyed the privilege of being in a covenant relationship with Yahweh could render acceptable worship. In order to worship acceptably then, a person had to be dynamically and corporately related to Yahweh. In our modern worship where often even unconverted individuals are allowed to participate directly in certain areas of the worship service because of some particular talent, the church would do well to reflect afresh on this requirement. 4) God's revelation regulates and directs the worship of His people.²⁰ Furthermore, the Word articulates and instructs the worshippers in terms of their responsibilities before, during, and as a consequence of entering into the presence of God in worship. 5) Communion and fellowship with God in His presence define and climax all genuine biblical worship.²¹ At the end of the day, worship is more than just performing a certain set of activities in the right way. It is even more than performing these activities with the right heart and life. It is ultimately the fact that by means of worship not only do we glorify God, we experience the ultimate privilege available to a redeemed human – fellowship with His presence. In a sense worship is our entering into His presence in a way that pleases Him for goals and ends that glorify Him and responding appropriately.²²

II. Biblical Worship is necessary because Man is Designed for It

A. As a Creature in God's Universe

God's primary and chief end in all that He does is His glory. Multiple passages demonstrate God's ultimate interest that His glory be manifested in His universe by His creation.

One of the places in Scripture where this is most evident is Isaiah's prophecy. God announces that He has created Man for His glory (43:6-7). He announces that the primary reason He established Israel as His chosen

²⁰ Hilber's statement is worth repeating here in full. "God's word 'defines' the covenant relationship and provides for communication in worship. God's word is the objective instruction about the nature of the covenant God, what benefits he bestows and what service he requires under covenant. So the words serves the communication of God's will to the people (for their service) and for the people's response to him." *JETS* 39:2 (June 1996) p. 185.

²¹"The presence of YHWH stands out as the most distinguishing feature of the covenant relationship. Divine presence 'characterizes' the covenant relationship in the sense that God's presence is the benefit of the covenant (with all that his presence means for the worshiper's protection and subsistence). It is the glorious presence of YHWH that invokes the response of his people." Hilber, *JETS* 39:2 (June 1996) p. 185.

²² Hilber notes that "Response is an appropriate word because worship came at the invitation of God. The choice of the term 'response' is deliberately ambiguous to accommodate the full range of experiences on the part of the worshippers. Initially the theophany on Mount Sinai invoked only fearful trembling (Exod 20:18-21). The covenant ratification ceremony invoked solemn dedication. The communal meal on Sinai was likely characterized by joyful celebration." He goes on to note several places in the OT where worship and communal meals are tied together. *JETS* 39:2 (June 1996) p. 185.

nation was for His glory (49:3). Numbers of other OT and NT passages indicate God desires that His creation in general, and Man in particular make His glory the primary aim and end of their existence (I Chron. 16:24; Isaiah 66:18; Philippians 2:10-11). The psalmist goes as far as to announce that God desires that the entire earth be filled with His glory (72:18-19).

Clearly God has determined that His creation make glorifying Him the ultimate and chief goal of their existence. We exist by Him and for Him and the ultimate purpose of our existence is to glorify God by adoring Him and worshipping Him.

If all of God's creation was designed and created by God to worship Him, then as a part of creation, Man has the responsibility to live as a one who advances God's desire for His glory and the way God has instructed men to do this is by rendering Him acceptable biblical worship.

God desires that men do this gladly and acceptably and He has gone to great lengths to make this possible by redeeming men and then providing both the instruction and the means for acceptable worship (as we have already seen). However, ultimately, all men will bow their knee in submissive worship to His name and will glorify Him as Sovereign God (Philippians 2:1-10).

B. As an Image-Bearer in God's Structure

All of God's creation is designed to advance His glory. However, Man has a unique ability to do so in a relational way that the Scriptures do not seem to present to the rest of God's inanimate creation. Only personal beings (angels and humans) are recorded as having the ability to glorify God through the personal act of relational worship (either individually or corporately).

Three texts will serve to demonstrate this important dynamic.

1. John 4:24

In this text, Jesus announces that God is seeking worshippers and has made it possible for men to worship him acceptably. Jesus here takes the time to interact with a single individual who in the eyes of society would have been insignificant and despised (as a woman, and then even more so as one of questionable moral character) – and yet, Jesus in instructing her about worship illustrates the point He announces here – God is intensely interested in and is seeking for worshippers!

2. Romans 1:18-25

This passage reveals God's desire to be worshipped in that He holds men who refuse to worship Him acceptably accountable and without excuse. This text reveals that God's desire is that men respond to Him by honoring Him out of a thankful heart for both who He is and what He has done. Furthermore, this passage reveals that the primary way men are to do this is through glad and acceptable worship of the Creator.

However, this grand intent is presented from a negative perspective. In other words, by showing us the reason for His displeasure against men who are held accountable and who have no excuse, we are instructed as to God's true desire for His image-bearers. And what God is angry at is that His image-bearers who were created to represent Him and to advance His glory have made an intentional and informed choice to pursue another goal. Rather than pursuing the glory of the Creator by glad and appropriate worship they had abandoned themselves to the glorification and worship of the creature.

In so doing, they set up a system in which they were worshipping the wrong object (creature instead of creator) in the wrong way (subjectively as creators of the idols rather than submissively and responsibly as created beings) for wrong reasons (lusts out of debased hearts) with wrong presuppositions (lie instead of truth) with horrible consequences (God gave them over) and with absolutely no excuse.

This horrible picture reveals more than just worship run amuck. It teaches that man is an inherent worshipper.²³ Second, it teaches that fallen man left to himself will always worship falsely. Third, it reveals there is no excuse for false worship and we will be held accountable for engaging in such worship. Fourth, it teaches that one will either worship according to truth or according to "the lie." Further, the fall resulted in marred image-bearers with a natural hostility to God and therefore a natural desire to suppress the truth no matter how loudly they proclaim a desire to "find or seek" truth. Men will never seek truth on their own. Men become

²³ Ronald Man articulates this idea in the following extended paragraph. "The basic issue here is one of worship, for that is at the heart of the sin problem (which has brought God's wrath). This fact is made explicit in verse 25, is implicit in verse 21, and plays a major role in Genesis 3 as well. . . . Indeed, in Genesis 3 the temptation that the serpent dangled before Eve was that she could become "like God" (Gen. 3:5). And that cuts at the very core of worship, for true worship assumes a fundamental distinction between the object of worship and the worshiper. True worship assumes that only God is worthy of worship. (Even in its most banal use the word 'worship' implies a vast superiority of its object – one might be said to worship a ballplayer or a hero because his capabilities are so far above one's own. And regarding God and humans the difference is of course infinite.) Someone has said, 'all mistakes about prayer are mistakes about God.' The same is true of worship: All mistakes about worship are mistakes about God. If people would acknowledge God as God, and recognize they are His creatures, they would be well on their way to true worship. But this is the truth that natural man has suppressed, as Romans 1:19-21 makes clear." *BSac* 157:625 (Jan 00) pp. 28-29

genuine seekers of truth only when God works in them. The Scriptures present God as the seeker and Man as the suppressor of Truth. Only God can change this. The next passage encourages us by revealing that God has moved in the hearts of an innumerable multitude of men who have been transformed into genuine worshippers!

3. Revelation 5:8-14

⁸ When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹ And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. ¹⁰ "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth." ¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, ¹² saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." ¹³ And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." ¹⁴ And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped.

This passage serves as a window that transports us into the very throne-room of Heaven where God is seated on His throne and a multitude of angels and redeemed men are gathered around the throne. Several observations are in order.

First, only redeemed men and holy angels are present. A primary qualification or prerequisite to participation is being rightly related to the One seated on the throne.

Second, everything present around the throne was created by the One on the throne and is pursuing the activity for which he was created – worship.

Third, those redeemed men present are there by the initiative and the sacrificial atoning work of the Lamb of God (5:9). God not only desires and demands our worship – He purchased and redeemed the worshippers!

Fourth, God is at the center of the throng physically and is the central object of their focus and worship. Worship in Heaven is about Him – the only time anything else is mentioned in this worship it is only mentioned as a reason or ground for further exalting God!

Fifth, Angels are seen as worshipping God. There are aspects to Heavenly worship that we are exposed to but are given no explanation or illumination. However we can make at least this observation. The motive for worship must go beyond thankfulness for redemption. Angels are not redeemed creatures – and yet they engage in the same worship as redeemed men. Certainly there can be more than one reason for rendering worship to God but at the end of the day worship is rendered to God simply because He is God and irrespective of what He has done or not done for His creatures.

Sixth, worship is unceasing, intelligent, intentional, and central to all that is happening in this narrative. “Worship is the business of heaven, the preoccupation of heaven, we might almost say the obsession of heaven: all its inhabitants focus on God and proclaim his supreme value and worth and glory. All is focused on worship. And, as citizens of heaven, that should be our focus as well.”²⁴

So – both as a creature in God’s universe and as an image bearer – Man is fundamentally designed to be a worshipper. And, the Scriptures end by describing all redeemed men rendering glad, exuberant, and acceptable worship to God throughout all eternity. But – how are the particular individuals comprising this worshipping multitude different than the other created but fallen creature who are eternally separated from God? Another way of asking this is: “How does one get into this throng and avoid the other?” The answer is found in our next point where we understand that although all men are inherently designed for worship, some men are divinely equipped and enabled to worship.

C. As a Beneficiary of God’s Redemption (Ephesians 1:1-14)

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus: ² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵ He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace ⁸ which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight ⁹ He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him ¹⁰ with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the

²⁴Ron Man, “Worship and the Glory of God” in RAR 9:2 (Spring 2000) p.87.

earth. In Him¹¹ also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,¹² to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.¹³ In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,¹⁴ who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

Ephesians 1:3-14 comprises one of the longest continuous sentences in the Greek New Testament. Paul begins by calling all believers to recognize and proclaim the “blessedness of God.” This is another way of calling believers to exalt and glorify God by declaring something about Him – His worthiness to receive our blessing.

Clearly, Man is not in a position to bestow “blessing” on God. On the contrary, God is the one who is seen as the exclusive source of any and all spiritual blessings we enjoy in Christ. And Paul makes this point directly and definitively by reminding us that God has in fact really bestowed all spiritual blessing on us and He has done so by means of our relationship with Christ and Christ’s work on our behalf. Lest the harsh and at times impossible circumstances of our lives cause us to doubt this, Paul reminds us that the sphere in which God has given us these blessings is the heavenly sphere rather than here on earth. Because all of this is in fact reality for us – and because God has been the One to give us all these blessings – we are to “bless” or exalt Him with our heartfelt and thankful praise. This is worship terminology!

Paul calls the believers who have experienced this unbelievable and gracious work from God (and all true believers have experienced this) to respond in worship – to glorify and exalt God as “Blessed.”

So, Paul’s basic premise is that because God has really given us all spiritual blessing, He is worthy of our glad worship! He then goes on to articulate three primary blessings along with their accompanying benefits and purposes for which believers should respond in glad and thankful worship.

1. We should worship God in glad praise because God the Father has chosen us! (1:4-6)
2. We should worship God in glad praise because God the Son has redeemed us! (1:7-12)
3. We should worship God in glad praise because God the Spirit has sealed us! (1:13-14)

What is interesting is that each of these sections tells us God's ultimate goal and primary aim in bestowing each of these benefits – it was for the praise of His glory!

We were not chosen primarily for our benefit or because we were needy but for the exaltation and magnification of His glory and grace.

We were not redeemed primarily for our benefit but for the greater magnification of His glory.

We were not sealed and authenticated by the Spirit for our sakes but for the sake/advancement of His glory!

Because God's primary objective at every stage of our redemption (past election, present redemption, future inheritance/security) was the exaltation and magnification of His glory – then our chief aim and end as chosen, redeemed, and sealed believers should be to render Him praise that exalts His glory – this is at the heart of all true worship!

D. As a Member of God's Body (I Cor. 1-15)

Many passages in First Corinthians are set in the context of corporate worship. Paul is dealing with problems that have corrupted and affected the corporate worship of this assembly. In fact, the entire book can be seen as a treatise addressing the problems that have arisen in corporate worship. As such, it teaches us that as functioning members of God's body we are to conduct ourselves so as to render proper and acceptable worship!

First, their worship had been hindered by the divisions they had allowed to come into their midst (1:10).

Second, their worship had been hindered by their desire to adjust and accommodate the gospel to their culture. (1 – 2)

Third, their worship had been hindered by their inappropriate approach and view of the ministers God had appointed over them (3-4)

Fourth, their worship had been hindered by their toleration of both sinning "brothers" and sin in their own lives. This toleration had led to relational breaches in the body itself, between individual believers, and ultimately between the believer and God Himself. All of this resulted in a disgraced church offering disallowed and deviant worship! (5-6)

Fifth, their worship had been hindered by both inappropriate sexual conduct (both abstinence as well as adultery) and by a fundamental discontentedness with God's call upon their lives (7).

Sixth, their worship had become deviant due to a misperception and misuse of Christian liberty in the name of theological justification (8-10).

Seventh, their worship had become deviant and disgraceful due to an inappropriate cultural accommodation (11)

Eighth, their worship had become dangerous due to a misuse and careless approach to the ordinances.

Ninth, their worship had become divisive and loveless due to a flawed view of, an unhealthy pursuit of, and a wrong use of spiritual gifts.

Tenth, their worship had become depressive due to a forgetting of the foundational importance and simplicity of the gospel and its implications for all of life both here and hereafter (resurrection passages) – (15).

So, because we are to be functional members in God's body, our worship matters. When we grow careless or indifferent about our worship or when we accommodate it to the surrounding culture or when we misuse the elements God has prescribed for acceptable worship, not only does our worship become deviant and disallowed, it actually can become dangerously deadly.

III. Biblical Worship is necessary because Satan has Perverted It

A. Satan's Perversion of True Worship

As God's arch enemy, Satan has mounted an all out campaign to divert and take for himself worship from God's creatures that is rightly God's. He does this by directing their worship to the wrong object (something other than God) or by defiling their worship of God (worshipping the right object but in the wrong way or with a wrong heart). Nor should we be surprised by this – after all Satan's original sin was committed in a worship context and was itself a worship violation. Satan's great objective is to destroy the worship of God and if possible to destroy the worshipper in the process. Many examples of this exist in Scripture but for the purpose of our study, we will limit our discussion to two primary passages.

1. Genesis 3:1-8

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden '?"² The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat;³ but from

the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'"⁴ The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die!"⁵ "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."⁶ When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.⁸ They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

This narrative contains several important observations related to Satan's attack on biblically ordained and directed worship.

First, note that this narrative is set in a worship context. The Lord has prepared a special place at the center of His larger creation where He has placed Man. One of the primary emphasis of the garden narrative is the open and unhindered fellowship that Adam enjoyed with God. Since part of our definition of worship was entering and experiencing the presence of God, this certainly would seem to be pre-Fall worship. It is here that we see "fellowship/communion" as a primary element of worship.

Second, there are elements in the text that indicate that God is intending Eden to represent a place of worship. For example, the directions and descriptions of the garden correlate to the directions and descriptions of the land God would later give to Israel. It was His intention that this nation serve as a Kingdom of Priests mediating His blessing to the surrounding nations. Another hint that this is a worship context is seen in the terminology God uses to assign Adam the task of caring for and guarding the garden. The same terms occur later in the Pentateuch to describe the duties the priests have for the tabernacle.

Third, God has given a revealed statement around which worship happens. It is precisely at this point where Satan attempts to gain advantage over the worshippers. God had given clear, precise, and direct statements about how Adam and Eve were to serve Him in the garden. Satan came and challenged those statements. In essence Satan's questions were designed to deceive Adam and Eve into believing that God didn't really care how they worshipped Him. Furthermore, the statements from God regarding how Adam and Eve were to serve/worship God were presented as overly restrictive and standing in the way of greater knowledge and freedom. One might argue that this really was not about worship; it was simply a matter of obedience. However, God had commanded Adam to obey and

he had done so in the context of a worship environment. This passage teaches us the importance of personal attention and obedience to the statements of God as worshipers by revealing what happens when His express statements are disregarded.

Fourth, the statements that were disregarded did not on the surface seem to do directly with the adoration and glorification of God. They were related to knowledge and life. However, disregarding these seemingly unrelated statements ended up removing Adam from the presence of the Lord and ultimately from the worship environment God had prepared for Him. Great care should be given by modern worshipers to observe all that the Lord has commanded. It is interesting to note that when Moses gave Israel God's instructions in Exodus 19-23, many of the regulations did not seem to relate directly to the worship experience. However, they were presented and ratified by the people in a worship narrative (Exodus 24) and the people are recorded as vowing to do "all that the Lord had spoken." The point of departure for Adam and Eve was the disregarding of God's statements.

Fifth, it may legitimately be assumed that Eve did not hear the commands of God directly. However, this did not excuse her from violation. Simply because we don't know what God expects does not remove culpability when those expectations are violated. This is especially so when those expectations and regulations are readily available to the worshiper.

Sixth, the point of temptation presented by Satan was to take something that God had restricted without waiting for God to give it to them in His time and according to His will. Satan persuaded Eve that there was a better way to worship and it was hers for the taking. Yes, it violated her understanding of the Creator's statements but surely God would not have meant what He said at that point about dying, would He? At some point in this narrative, both Adam and Eve concluded for whatever reasons that God would really not follow through on what He had said would happen if they ate. Modern worshipers often commit the same violation when they assume that God is too loving or their motives are sincere enough to offset any penalties that God may have declared would come for carelessness or violation in worship.

Finally, in acting in this way, Adam and Eve reveal they value and honor the creature (the serpent) more than the Creator (God). Nor was this done in ignorance. They had known and heard the Creator and still determined to honor one of His creatures above Him. This is the essence of the idolatry described in Romans 1:19ff. It was immediately, directly, and severely dealt with by God. God makes it very clear that He will not share His glory with another and He demands the whole hearted allegiance of those who would worship Him acceptably. This would later be written by

Moses as the first, second, and third commandments: *Then God spoke all these words, saying,* ² *"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.* ³ *"You shall have no other gods before Me.* ⁴ *"You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.* ⁵ *"You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me,* ⁶ *but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.* ⁷ *"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain. (Exodus 20:1-7)*

2. Matthew 4:1-12

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. ² *And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred.* ³ *And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.* ⁴ *But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.* ⁵ *Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,* ⁶ *And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.* ⁷ *Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.* ⁸ *Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;* ⁹ *And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.* ¹⁰ *Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.* ¹¹ *Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.*

Note the following observations from the narrative:

First, Satan recognized the true identity of Christ. The phrase “if thou be” in verse 3 could be rendered, “because or since you are”. Satan is under no delusion as to Christ’s true identity. It is not a lack of information that drives Satan in false worship but rather his rebellion against God. This may seem an overly obvious point. However this significance of this statement is that all false worship is inherently sourced in Satan and is therefore not merely wrongly informed worship but rather ultimately rebellious worship. When we allow our worship to be shaped or influenced by Satan, the world he rules, or the culture comprised and

shaped primarily by forces and individuals under his control it has horrible implications for our worship as a church.

Second, at the heart of both Satan's temptation and Christ's defense was the Word of God. In other words, both individuals in the narrative appeal to the Word of God to make the case for their respective position. Satan in attempting to tempt Jesus to worship unacceptably is going to take specific statements from God's Word or clear inferences from certain Biblical narratives and use them inappropriately or out of context in order to give the appearance of Biblical credibility – "After all God the Father did say or do things like this, didn't He? Therefore, go ahead and make bread out of stones. Go ahead and cast yourself down from this pinnacle. Go ahead and bow down before me." Christ deftly answers each temptation with specific and accurate statements that God had really made. Much of what passes for worship in the contemporary church is done in God's name, for the supposed advance of His work, and defended under the banner of biblical warrant. However, much of what passes for biblical warrant has about as much substance and accuracy as Satan's use of Scripture had here in the temptation.

Third, Satan's temptations progress in their blatant perversion of worship. In the first temptation Christ is exhorted to do something that surely God would be able to do and that would meet a legitimate human need. Satan knew full well who Christ was and suggested that He use rights and powers that were His as God to satisfy needs that were physically present at the moment. On the surface one could almost argue that this would in fact accomplish a number of good things: preservation of life and demonstration of Christ's power and glory. However, any use of His power apart from and in subjection to the Father would be an inappropriate and wrong use. Often much in contemporary worship is justified in that it meets legitimate needs and declares God's glory. But when this is done in ways and means that are not submitted to God and His word, it is inappropriate worship. The second temptation moves to the realm of direct biblical statement. Satan suggested Jesus do something that would clearly be inappropriate and appealed to direct biblical statement in order to defend his preposterous suggestion. Nor did was this strategy limited to this occasion in the wilderness. Many modern evangelical churches defend worship that is clearly preposterous and they use specific statements from the Word to do so. Finally, Satan tempts Jesus to blaspheme and commit idolatry as another way, an improved and more effective way, of getting what God the Father had ordained for Christ to have but through a different path and by a different means. God always intended for Jesus to have all the kingdoms of the world but they would come in His time (at the end of the age at the Second Coming) and through His appointed means (the Cross and the Elevation of Christ). Satan was suggesting that this "good end" could be accomplished in a

much simpler and faster way without all the suffering and difficulty. All that was required was an adjustment in the object of Christ's worship – from God to Satan. Satan always presents idolatry as the easier, shorter path to a legitimate goal. God reminds us repeatedly that the end of this seductive path is only bondage and judgment. Had Christ yielded this worship rather than being given the worlds He would have been judged along with the world when the Father judges righteously. As a result of His obedience, the Father has given Him all judgment over the world.

Finally, at each point Satan is rebuked directly and immediately with clear and accurate statements from God's word. All who would protect pure worship must realize the need to know and understand God's word accurately and directly (applicationaly). The weapon God has given us to protect and defend Biblical worship is His Word.

B. Man's Propensity to False Worship²⁵

God has given specific statements directing both the form and the content of worship acceptable to Him.²⁶ The sad record of Man's response to this prescribed worship is recounted all through the Scripture. Tragically, fallen Man's propensity to fallen worship is perhaps one of the strongest reasons for the necessary and vigilant protection of genuine biblical worship.

Several reformers observed this propensity in their age and stated it powerfully and directly. For example, Calvin observed that our minds are "perpetual idol-factories." Luther noted that we are by nature idolaters and we get this propensity by inheritance as much as by choice and as such, idolatry seems inherently pleasant to us. Wesley would later observe that every man is born a rank idolater and loves to remain so!²⁷

One writer observed about our age in particular, "Humanity, having been created in God's image, and with a sense of deity indelibly written on its heart, is inescapably religious. However, since the fall, our tendency is to attempt to create God in our own image and thus worship ourselves rather than the one in whose image we were made."²⁸

²⁵ Much of the information in this section can be found in fuller form in a chapter written by J. Ligdon Duncan III entitled "Foundations for Biblically Directed Worship" in *Give Praise to God* edited by Philip G. Ryken, Derek W. H. Thomas, and J. Ligdon Duncan III.

²⁶ The Reformers used to refer to this concept as the "Regulatory Principle." It is basically articulated and defended by them in the Westminster Confession of Faith in the following summary/paraphrase: "The acceptable way of worshipping God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture." (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 21.1)

²⁷ Duncan, *Give Praise to God*, pp. 59-60.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

What we are really asking in this segment is this: “As long as I worship Him, does God really care how and where I do it? Is God really concerned with much more than just the object and the sincerity of my worship. Does He concern Himself with the circumstances and particulars of how I worship? The following accounts through Scripture present an undeniable case that God is not only concerned that we worship Him and that we do so sincerely – He is also concerned about the accuracy and the circumstances that comprise the way we worship Him. And His concern should make us concerned – His standard response to inappropriate worship of Himself is severe and often final.

1. Cain and Abel (Genesis 3-7)

The problem here was defective worship. In this passage, two worshipers present their worship to God who accepts one and rejects the other. Furthermore, God addresses the rejected worshiper and alerts him that the reason for His divine displeasure was that Cain had not done well (v 7 – If you do well will not your countenance be lifted up?). Although we are not given the particular details, both Cain and Abel had sufficient information about what constituted acceptable worship and are held accountable by the object of their worship. Cain was not guilty of a failure to worship or of worshipping a false god. His worship was defective because it did not measure up to standards that God had set before Cain.

The problem may have been that Cain failed to offer with a right spirit or it may have been that he failed to offer in conformity with truth – what and how God had prescribed. We are not told specifically where Cain failed but it may be observed that his worship was either defective in spirit or in truth or in both spirit and truth. God in response to this failure warns that unless repentance and right worship ensue, further sin lies ahead. Sins in worship inevitably lead to further sin in other areas of life.

2. Pharaoh and Moses (Exodus 3-14)

The problem here was competitive false worship. Pharaoh and Moses engage in an ongoing contest. Moses represents God visibly and verbally to Pharaoh and presents God’s demand that he let Israel go for the purpose of rendering proper and acceptable worship to God (3:12, 18; 4:23; 5:1, 3). Moses clearly indicates that they must go outside the land of Egypt to a separate and specific location of God’s choosing in order to render Him obedient worship. This would be instructive for Israel in helping them understand that worship space was sacred. God not only

demanded their worship but specifically selected the place where worship could be offered! In the OT this eventually became the tabernacle and then the Temple. In the NT, the Lord Himself replaced the temple and became the location for all genuine and true biblical worship.²⁹

Rather than accept God's demands for His people, Pharaoh contested both God's right to be worshipped as well as the prescribed way in which He wished to be worshipped. Pharaoh responds to Moses' demands with a series of compromises. Moses refused to yield and accommodate on any point. This same problem exists today when we are asked to adjust our worship in order to please or accommodate a competing worship system.

3. Golden Calf (Exodus 32:1-10)

The problem here was idolatrous worship. The particulars of the narrative are horribly familiar to us. God has given specific commandments to His people regarding how they are to worship and Moses has announced them to the people. Because of their impatience at Moses long delay, the people press their priest to make an image of their God and to announce a feast day. This do-it-yourself worship was greatly received by the people but it led them into sin. One writer put it this way, "The feast day comes, the people worship their self-derived god in their self-derived way, and gross immorality results."³⁰

God alerts Moses to the disobedience of the people and charges them not so much with departing from worshipping Him but with departing from the specific way in which He has commanded them to worship. For this they are to be judged.

- a. They have departed because of impatience. And, they have departed from the specific statements and commandments He had ordained for them and their protection in the worship of an all holy God.
- b. This was a specific and known way which He had commanded them. However sincere this worship might have been, the impatience of the people led them to changes in worship that produced a disobedient worship.
- c. This disobedience was a direct violation of the first and second commandments and it led Israel to worship God in a way He had specifically stated was non acceptable due to

²⁹ For a healthy discussion on Jesus replacing the Temple imagery in John see David Peterson's chapter entitled "Jesus and the New Temple" in *Engaging With God*.

³⁰ *Give Praise to God*, p. 37.

His true nature. In depicting Him and reducing Him to an image they had actually crossed the line into idolatrous worship.

4. Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10)

The problem here was deviant worship in the offering of non-sanctified fire. This was motivated by carelessness and convenience.

5. Saul's Sacrifice (1 Samuel 15)

The problem here was insincere and disobedient worship. God had specifically regulated who could offer the sacrifice as well as mandated that sacrifices be offered. Saul knew that the people knew this and would not go to battle without the sacrifice being offered. Seeing his opportunity against the enemy rapidly disappearing, Saul determined to "get the show on the road" by getting the sacrifice out of the way. His actions reveal that for him the sacrifice was a perfunctory part of the process, much like the opening prayer at one of our modern public gatherings.

6. David and Uzzah (2 Samuel 6)

The problem here was sincere but careless worship. David sincerely wanted to bring the ark to Jerusalem and worshipped as he brought it there. However carelessness about the details related to the proper transportation of the ark resulted in the tragic death of a man sincerely acting to protect the ark. God had given clear and direct statements which if had been followed would have averted the tragic consequences.

7. Uzziah (w Chronicles 26)

The problem here was proud and arrogant worship.

8. Pharisees and Jesus (Matthew 15:1-14)

Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, ² "Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." ³ And He answered and said to them, "Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? ⁴ "For God said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER,' and, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH.' ⁵ "But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or

mother, "Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God,"⁶ he is not to honor his father or his mother.' And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition.⁷ "You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you:⁸ **'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.'**⁹ **'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'**"¹⁰ After Jesus called the crowd to Him, He said to them, "Hear and understand."¹¹ "It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man."¹² Then the disciples came and said to Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?"¹³ But He answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted."¹⁴ "Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit."

The problem here was perverted worship

9. Samaritans and Jews (John 4)

The problem here was uninformed worship. Note that this had originally come up as a means of keeping the people of the Northern kingdom from returning to worship at Jerusalem as God had commanded. This is a powerful reminder that our deviant worship may have impact for generations to come.

10. Paul and the Galatians and Colossians

The problem here was heretical worship. Heretical in that it had been influenced by and adapted to the cultural norms of the day. In Galatia those norms were Jewish nationalism. In Colossians those norms were Jewish and Greek gnosis!

IV. Biblical Worship is necessary because Scripture has Prescribed It

A. As the Primary Means of Advancing God's Program (1 Peter 3:15)

But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.

Peter is writing to believers living in circumstances hostile to their faith and difficult for their worship. They lived in a culture that was religious and where everyone worshipped gods of their own choosing. As long as

you fit within the flow of worldly worship, you were accepted. However, the moment you engaged in the pursuit of exclusive and acceptable worship of the Lord Jesus Christ, you became the immediate target of a hostile world. With this in mind, Peter set out to help believers understand how a commitment to right worship both corporately and privately was a powerful way to advance God's program in that very environment.

He reminds believers to reject and turn away from the wickedness of their surrounding culture (3:10-11). He reminds them that the Lord is attentive to those who worship out of a pure life committed to purity and to standing as a counter to the culture rather than conforming to its pressures (3:12). He assures them they will suffer for doing right but they can be assured that God has not abandoned nor forgotten them (3:14). He climaxes his instruction by reminding these battered believers that their personal life worship was a powerful way to counter the culture around them and to make a difference for the Lord Jesus Christ.

In an age when contemporary church leaders are encouraging believers to adjust their worship (corporately and privately) to accommodate the culture, Peter's words stand as a strong rebuke and reminder that the fear of man brings a snare!

1. The Mandated Activity – Sanctify the Lord

The idea here is to set apart or to make unique or sacred. If believers were going to counter their culture appropriately, then they would have to worship God exclusively and differently than society worshipped and considered their gods.

This was to be a definitive decision they were to reach at some point in life that would then shape the rest of life from that point forward (note the use of the aorist imperative).

This kind of exclusive worship mandates that Christ be more than just a deity added to the schedule of activities – rather, He was to be the center of all of life and everything about one's life was to be lived under His authority and from His perspective.

Jesus was to be distinct and unique from all else in our life. Additionally, He was to be supreme and sovereign over all the affairs of our life. A person who honestly attempted to live every day of his life in this manner would have been very different from others in his culture. It was precisely this difference that would make his worship so impacting!

Contemporary Evangelicals argue that we must erase as many of the differences that stand between the church and the world in order to make our worship comfortable to the non-believer in the hopes of having greater influence. This passage would seem to counter by stating that it is when we set Christ apart as unique from everything else in our life and culture and worship Him as such that we will gain the greatest power and influence over our culture.

2. The Specified Arena – in your heart.

The word “heart” signifies our entire life. This teaches us that worship is primarily a matter of the inner man before it can be effective externally. Worship must involve right actions but right actions are in and of themselves insufficient. Right actions must come as an outflow of a right heart – a heart that has genuinely submitted to and is in love with the object of its worship.

A second implication is that we are willing worshippers of that which we have set apart in our heart. Unless we have set God apart in our heart for this purpose, then even though we worship him externally, our real heart worship will go to what has been enthroned by our heart. This is the real essence of idolatry and false worship.

3. The Worthy Aspiration – to give an answer

Literally, our aspiration is to always be able to explain the confidence or settled assurance that governs our life in the midst of a hostile and difficult environment at any time or under any circumstance (note the use of the present active participle). The idea behind the concept of hope is settled confidence that allows us to face any and all circumstances as a genuine and accepted worshiper of God should do.

When we face success we act and respond as genuine worshippers who have set Christ apart as the ruler of heart and life. When we face trial and hardship, persecution and tribulation, disease and death, we respond as genuine worshippers of Christ. When we fail or sin, we respond as genuine worshippers of Christ.

Living in this way will allow us to impact our culture in far greater and more lasting ways than any cultural accommodation we make to our corporate worship style.

4. The Necessary Attitudes

In order to live this way we are going to need gentleness, to bring our strong desires and our will under the control of another – in this case God. In order to be willing to do this we must be convinced that God is able and capable to govern our lives – in short we must hold God in awesome reverence or we will find it impossible to give Him this kind of control over our lives.

B. As the Primary Means of Shaping God’s Community (Acts 2:42-47)

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.⁴³ Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.⁴⁴ Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common,⁴⁵ and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.⁴⁶ So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

The material in this section in Acts is one of 6 pictures that Luke paints to help us understand what the early church was like, how she was received by the world, and the impact she made for Christ in the midst of a pagan culture. In short, this is the story of the first church and what happened to her as she worshipped!

While Acts is giving us a description of how things were and not necessarily a prescription for how every detail should be in our churches today – never-the-less, in understanding the fundamental make up of the early church, there is much that was then that should in fact be now in our worship!

1 Dynamic Relationships

Related to Truth – Learning with a view to Obey

They continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine (2:42)

The Apostles’ doctrine is literally “the teaching” (note definite article). This was a **specific and spirit delivered body** of truth – not just someone’s neat ideas. Furthermore, his was a **contained and identifiable body of truth** – “the faith once delivered” (contained in the Scriptures). This was an **authoritative and inspired** body of truth. This was a **sufficient and capable** body of truth. All of these facts explain in part why they were continually

devoting (presenting themselves – making themselves available) to learn more about the Bible in order that they might obey.

Related to the Body of Christ (Church/Community of believers) – Loving with a view to Participate

They continued steadfastly in . . . “the fellowship” (2:42)

The idea here is more than just the idea of having a good time together. Rather it is the idea of corporate-ness or fellowship in the sense of participation or membership in a group

Here was a group of believers numbering about 120 that were distinct and different – clearly and identifiably so. If you lived in Jerusalem you would immediately know who this group was. The idea here is that 3000 people had heard this little band’s message – what the group believed and what made them distinct and different and had believed. Now they identified with that group – they did not come simply as spectators but they “signed up” as it were. In other words, they fully identified and joined themselves to the group and now were willing to participate and serve!

Related to God – Lauding (worshipping) with a view to Glorify

They continued steadfastly in . . . breaking of bread and prayers

The worship of the early church consisted of at least four primary things: a) The **exposition of Scripture** – Preaching (and singing); b) The **gathering of the Corporate Body** – “fellowship.” This was not the idea of worshipping individually and alone but rather the gathering of the body together for the purpose of glad, word centered worship; c) The **observing of the Lord’s table** – breaking of bread; d) The **offering up of prayers** – “the prayers” seems to indicate there was a formal time when believers would meet together to offer up corporate prayer to God. This certainly would have indicated that there was private praying going on – but this seems to be more – the body as a group lived with the reality that they would not survive much less advance unless God blessed and opened the way – hence they gave themselves privately and corporately to the practice of prayer.

Related to World – Living with a view to Evangelize (2:46-47)

⁴⁶ *So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,* ⁴⁷ *praising God and having favor with all the*

people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Several observations are important. First, It was their consistent practice – daily (note the imperfects). Second, it was their committed practice – in the temple (they would have found it harder to do so here than any other place given their deviation from standard Judaism and Jesus’ reputation regarding the “temple.” Finally, it was their constant practice – everywhere they were – in the temple, in their houses, or in their culture

Note: When they lived in such a way as to render acceptable praise unto God – God granted them favor/praise in the eyes of the people. This was not just what they did in their worship services – clearly they preached the gospel and proclaimed Christ powerfully and persuasively. However, nor was this just the verbal witness or proclamation of the message about Christ and salvation by itself. What made it all so powerful was their committed and consistent Christian life: Heartfelt Obedience to God; Genuine Love and Care for Each Other; Consistent Integrity before the World.

2. Biblical Leadership (2:42-43)

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.⁴³ Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

The perspective described by the NT on early church leadership can be described as: **a) Scriptural** – God gave leaders to the Church (Ephesians 4:11; Acts 20:28); **b) Sanctified** – (Acts 20:28 – take heed to yourselves; Acts 24:16 – a conscience void of offense; I Timothy 3/Titus 1); **c) Specific** – Their task is specific and not general. They are charged to give attention to the task and are warned about the danger of distraction or deviation from the task. They are to rightly divide and preach the word of truth – so as not to be ashamed. (2 Tim 2:15; 4:1-2). They are to give attention to reading (explaining the truth), exhorting (applying the truth), and to doctrine (defending or arguing for the truth, 1 Tim 4:13). They are to protect the flock of God (Acts 20:28) from external danger, internal false teachers, and impurity. They are to feed and equip the flock of God for the work of the ministry. (Ephesians 4:12; 1 Peter 5:2). They are to administrate the affairs of God’s work (I Cor 3-4); **d) Shared** – In the NT there seems to be a definite, careful, and mutually submissive sharing of this leadership role in the early church and it was fleshed out in

different models from city to city in the NT. Sometimes it seems that there is just one such person in the body – for example, the Church at Philippi (the leader was addressed to unify Euodius and Syntache). However, sometimes (and perhaps in larger and more populated cities where the church was larger) there seems to be a sharing of this role.

- Ephesus – one of the larger metropolis areas – “the elders over the flock are called” (Acts 20:17)
- Rome – note the number of leaders addressed in Chapter 16
- Jerusalem – note the role of James and Peter (Acts 15)

3. **Invigorating Attitudes (2:43-47)**

In addition to Word driven Worship and Personal Devotion which we have already seen in 2:42 – there were three other key attitudes that invigorated this community of believers and made it possible for them to have great impact on their world.

Reverential Awe (2:43)

⁴³ *Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.*

This was the continual state of believers (5:5, 11; 19:17) and was due to the constant sense that they were in the presence of God and that He was in their midst. This was attested to by powerful and undeniable evidences that He was at work (in their case miracles done by the apostles)

Sincere and Loving Unity (2:44-46)

⁴⁴ *Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common,* ⁴⁵ *and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.* ⁴⁶ *So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,*

Note the idea of having all things common is unity expressed by loving care for one another as a regular way of life. If a believer had a need, the common and regular practice was for those who had to sell and distribute the proceeds to meet the needs of those who lacked. Note that their love and fellowship was both glad and sincere! Sincere has the idea of “clear and without hidden obstacles.” It is used in other places to describe a field with “no

hidden rocks” Their fellowship and relationships with each other were sincere and there were no “hidden rocks or agendas”

Joyful Adoration (2:47)

⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

This was regular and ongoing – it was their constant and regular life pattern in praising God. Note that right relationships and obedient living all precede and are prerequisites to praising God properly and effectively.

4. Powerful Impact (2:47)

⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

They Represented God Attractively and Accurately

Praising God – obedient, loving people make a wonderful and accurate representation of the power of the Gospel.

They Advanced His Name Powerfully and Effectively

Having favor with the people – such living and loving makes a powerful and effective impact on a community. Some of the reasons the early church found favor with the common people can be discerned from the apology written by the philosopher Aristides early in the second century:

Now the Christians, O King, by going about and seeking, have found the truth. For they know and trust in God, the Maker of heaven and earth, who has no fellow. From him they received those commandments which they have engraved on their minds, and which they observe in the hope and expectation of the world to come.

For this reason they do not commit adultery or immorality; they do not bear false witness, or embezzle, nor do they covet what is not theirs. They honor father and mother, and do good to those who are their neighbors. Whenever they are judges, they judge uprightly. They do not worship idols made in the image of man. Whatever they do not wish that others should do to them, they in turn do not do; and they do not eat the food sacrificed to idols.

Those who oppress them they exhort and make them their friends. They do good to their enemies. Their wives, O King, are pure as virgins, and their daughters are modest. Their men abstain from all

unlawful sexual contact and from impurity, in the hope of recompense that is to come in another world.

As for their bondmen and bondwomen, and their children, if there are any, they persuade them to become Christians; and when they have done so, they call them brethren without distinction.

They refuse to worship strange gods; and they go their way in all humility and cheerfulness. Falsehood is not found among them. They love one another; the widow's needs are not ignored, and they rescue the orphan from the person who does him violence. He who has gives to him who has not, ungrudgingly and without boasting. When the Christians find a stranger, they bring him to their homes and rejoice over him as a true brother. They do not call brothers those who are bound by blood ties alone, but those who are brethren after the Spirit and in God.

When one of their poor passes away from the world, each provides for his burial according to his ability. If they hear of any of their number who are imprisoned or oppressed for the name of the Messiah, they all provide for his needs, and if it is possible to redeem him, they set him free.

If they find poverty in their midst, and they do not have spare food, they fast two or three days in order that the needy might be supplied with the necessities. They observe scrupulously the commandments of their Messiah, living honestly and soberly as the Lord their God ordered them. Every morning and every hour they praise and thank God for his goodness to them; and for their food and drink they offer thanksgiving.

If any righteous person of their number passes away from the world, they rejoice and thank God, and escort his body as if he were setting out from one place to another nearby. When a child is born to one of them, they praise God. If it dies in infancy, they thank God the more, as for one who has passed through the world without sins. But if one of them dies in his iniquity or in his sins, they grieve bitterly and sorrow as over one who is about to meet his doom.

Such, O King, is the commandment given to the Christians, and such is their conduct. (The Apology of Aristides, translated by Rendel Harris [London: Cambridge, 1893])

They were blessed by God Abundantly

And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved. They were seeing people come to Christ on a regular ongoing basis!

C. As the Primary Means of Forming Christian Character
Romans 12:1-2

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.² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

1. Based on God's prior action – “the mercies of God”. These mercies involve a relationship with God initiated by God and sustained by His grace.
2. The response required – the definitive (note use of the aorist tense in the midst of presents tense verbs) presentation of our bodies (not just our feelings) as instruments for God's service that will be acceptable sacrifices before Him. Note the similarities to Romans 6 where we are to present our bodies no longer as instruments of sin but of righteousness.
3. The process by which this is accomplished involves a resisting of the world and its desires that shape us when left unchecked. It also involves a transformation from the inside – not just external shaping either by the worldly lusts for pleasure and perversion or by the worldly desires for man-centered and external religion. Rather, to live acceptably and present our bodies to God in worship we must be transformed from the inside!
4. The method by which we are transformed – changed thinking. We need to think in new and different ways as believers about life and worship than the world around us thinks and believes. This has major implications for any system or philosophy of worship that goes to the world to discover how it can shape itself to be attractive to their thinking. A true worshipper who is accepted by God will think differently from the world around Him. He will have a renewed mind shaped by the Word that comes from God rather than the wisdom offered by the world.
5. The mandate for such living – ongoing, aggressive personal vigilance. Believers are to personally and continually guard against being pressed into the mold of world and shaped thereby. They are to be just as diligent to allow the Word and the Spirit to transform them through the process of the renewing of their minds (note the present tense imperatives).

6. The purpose or end of such obedience and worship – discerning and holding on to God’s will. This Word-shaped thinking will allow him to discern what is acceptable and whole (perfect) or healthy in God’s sight. In a generation that is caught up with the kind of thinking that states whatever is not directly prohibited is permissible for life and worship, this passage offers a strong counter thought. Believers are to discern biblically what is acceptable to God and sound for them and then they are to hold fast to that which is good (1 Thess 5:21).