WORSHIP GOD
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WORSHIP GOD

We live in a world where men have created every imaginable god that they worship. Because men have rejected the word of God, they are left to their own imagination concerning who God is and how they should worship Him. Religious people who refused to be guided by the word of God leave themselves at a great disadvantage concerning how they should manifest their worship. Apart from the direction of the word of God, they thus devise all sorts of forms and manners of worship. Spiritism and the occult fanaticize concerning the spirits and beings beyond this world. They thus invent every kind of meditation or worship that is pleasing to their emotions in order to please the spirits. This is the world in which we live, a world misguided by the religiosity of those who would seek to lead men after men instead of the word of God. Those who are guided by the word of God know better. They thus call all men to come to a knowledge of the God of the Bible in order that they might worship Him in spirit and truth.

INTRODUCTION

You also, as living stones,
are being built up a spiritual house,
a holy priesthood,
to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God
through Jesus Christ.
(1 Peter 2:5)

This one passage portrays the nature of all sons of God as the holy priesthood of faith. We are spiritual beings trapped in a clump of dust, yearning to pour out our hearts in worship to our Creator. “Therefore, by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name” (Hb 13:15).

There is no prescription for worship. There is no command in the Bible to worship. We are created after the image of God (Gn 1:26,27). This simple fact means that it is natural for the created to worship the Creator. It is unnatural if the created does not worship. From the beginning when God first breathed into Adam the breath of life, Adam became a worshipful being. God put within Adam that which would naturally turn to Him in worship. Adam’s worship was not defined, neither was it programmed, commanded, or reduced to rituals of worship. It was only natural, for those who were created after the image of God to worship their Creator. Our first definition of worship, therefore, is that worship involves response of the spiritual image that

Worship is natural, for it is inherent within the spirit of man.
is within man to the awesomeness of our
Creator. It is not about the worshipers. It
is all about the One who created us as
worshipful beings.

Before any written revelation was
given to man, men worshiped God. Be-
fore God revealed any sacrificial expres-
sions of worship, man worshiped. It is
for this reason that worship is not defined
by ceremonial procedures or perform-
ances that we would construct after our
own imagination or deduct from the
pages of the Bible. If there were no writ-
ten revelation from God, man would still
be a worshipful being, though he would
invent some system or means by which
to express his worship. It is for this rea-
son that there has never been a civiliza-
tion discovered that has not had some
form of religiosity and worship of either
spirits or beings greater than the wor-
shiper.

Man was created a worshipful be-
ing. Because worship is within the very
being of man, God did not have to im-
plant within man a robotic system to per-
form certain legal actions of worship.
Neither did He program man to worship
according to prescribed systems or cer-
emonies of worship. Since worshipful
beings invent something to worship, God
had to reveal to man guidelines that
would direct him from worshiping that
which he would create after the imagi-
nation of his thinking. The problem is
that man is a free-moral being who often
harbors a spirit of rebellion. He thus mis-
directs his worship. He becomes an
idolater. Men seek to be free from the
restrictions of God, but at the same time,
they must worship. The result of this
inner turmoil within man has been a his-
tory of idolatry since the days when man
took the first step away from the true and
living God in order to live according to
his own rules. And in living according
to his own rules, he has invented rules of
worship according to his own desires.

The idolater first creates a god af-
fter his own being, and then, he creates a
religion and worship that conforms to his
carnal desires. From the first step
ten men took away from God, God
began to call people back to
worship of Him only, and not the creation
of their imaginations. In order to direct
his conduct in worship, God has revealed
the vanity of man’s schemes of worship.
In revealing the vanity of such worship
schemes, it is God’s call to all men to
return to worship in spirit and truth.

We live in a world wherein Chis-
tendom is defined by a confused assort-
ment of worship ceremonies and expres-
sions that are often contrary to the true
worship that is defined in the Bible. It is
assumed by the vast majority of those
who call themselves under the name
“Christian” that God accepts all sorts of
expressions of worship, regardless of the
behavior of the worshiper or his beliefs.
This theology of worship has subse-
quently produced a wide spectrum of
what is defined as worship. By the time
of Jesus’ ministry, many of the Jewish
religious leaders had again created their
own theology of worship. But Jesus
called their worship “vain worship.” Paul used the term “self-made” worship in reference to the worship of the Gentiles. We would conclude, therefore, that God does not accept all worship, regardless of the sincere outpouring on the part of the worshiper. Simply because something is defined as worship by man does not mean that it is worship of God.

We live in a confused world of worshipers who have created vain and misleading worship that is imposed on millions throughout the world. Our only recourse out of this confusion of misguided worship is to identify, or verify our worship in the pages of God’s word. When we study the sincere worship of men and women of faith in the Bible, then we can begin to understand that our religious world is full of confusion concerning worship of the one true and living God. But when our worship of God is validated by His instructions, we are assured that we are pleasing to Him. It is only natural for the sons of God to seek His approval in all things that are done in reference to worship. So for this reason, sincere sons of God are into the word of God in order that they not stray from the object of their worship.

In reference to worship, the Bible speaks more of what one should not do in worship, than offer a legal prescription for worship. The word of God is a guide to keep us away from creating a god after our own imagination, and then creating worship of this imagined god. Thus God’s instructions concerning worship are given in order to redirect our attention to God and worship of Him only. The Bible was not given for the purpose of giving man a legal performance of worship by which one would be assured before God that he is worshiping God correctly if he performed a correct system of worship. Revelation was given in order that we know the one true and living God. And in knowing Him, we, through a knowledge of His revelation to us, will pour out our hearts in worship that is in spirit and truth.

Chapter 1

Words On Worship

The word “worship” refers to giving someone or some thing worth in respect and honor. Worship can be poured out to the imaginations that men create in their own minds, which worship is often focused on some material object that men have made in order to remind them of some god or spirit they have imagined. The Old Testament is filled with examples of men who gave worship to the creations of their own minds and craftsmanship of their own hands, and thus were idolatrous in their religiosity. We can learn from the misguided worship-
ers of the Old Testament (Rm 15:4; 1 Co 10:11). What we primarily learn is that we must caution ourselves concerning our worship. Not all worship is true. And since not all worship is true, then we are encouraged to seriously check our worship with the word of God.

There are some key expressions in Scripture that give us a preliminary definition of the heart of the worshiper. “As the deer pants after the water brooks, so pants my soul after You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Ps 42:1,2). “O God, You are my God. Early I will seek You. My soul thirsts for You. My flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water” (Ps 63:1). “My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God” (Ps 84:2). “I stretch forth my hands to You. My soul thirsts after You as a thirsty land” (Ps 143:6).

Worship is the craving of the soul of man for the source of his existence. It is praise and adoration that pours forth from the human spirit in appreciation for the preservation of one’s existence. Worship is veneration and homage, emotion and intellect that instinctively flows from the inner soul of the created. It is not something that is ceremonialized through actions and rituals, but spontaneously offered up by spiritually responsive individuals who recognize the work of God in their lives.

In our quest to restore true worship in a world that is filled with so much confusion by those who have little knowledge of God and His word, it is imperative that we investigate the Bible. Those who seek to pour out their hearts to God naturally seek to base their worship on the foundation of who God is as He defines Himself in His word. In order to begin our search for true worship, therefore, there are several words in the Bible both in Hebrew and Greek that are used in reference to worship.

**A. Worship is bowing down before God.**

The Hebrew word that is used most often to define worship in the Old Testament is *shahah*. The root meaning of this word refers to bowing down. Though not in a context of worship, when in Palestine, Abraham bowed down (*shahah*) to the people of the land, “even to the children of Heth” in order to manifest respect and honor (Gn 23:7). However, *shahah* is used in a worship context when Abraham went to the place where he was commanded by God to offer his son. Upon his arrival at the place, he told his servants, “Stay here with the donkey. I and the lad will go there and worship [shahah]” (Gn 22:5). In the worship contexts of the word *shahah* there was an inward bowing down of the heart that was manifested by a literal prostrating of the body.

When one’s heart bows to God in worship, his knees will follow.
of the worshiper on the ground. “Then the man bowed down his head and worshiped the Lord” (Gn 24:26). “And I bowed down my head and worshiped the Lord, and praised the Lord God of my master Abraham” (Gn 24:48). “Now it came to pass when Abraham’s servant heard their words, that he worshiped the Lord, bowing himself to the ground” (Gn 24:52). “They bowed their heads and worshiped” (Ex 4:31; see 12:27). “And Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped” (Ex 34:8). “And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped” (Ja 5:14). “Then Job arose and tore his robe. And he shaved his head and fell down on the ground and worshiped” (Jb 1:20). “O come and let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker” (Ps 95:6).

Inherent in the word shahah in a worship context, one bows down in his heart. In the Old Testament context where the word is used, the worshiper actually bowed prostrate before the Lord, often on the ground, because he first “bowed down” in his heart. The word shahah expresses the natural reaction of the created toward the Creator. True worship, therefore, must be manifested in one humbling himself before God. Though one may not always have the opportunity to physically bow down, the bowing down in one’s heart is certainly manifested in the heart of the true worshiper. The metaphorical application of shahah in worship would certainly speak contrary to what is often practiced in assemblies wherein attendees writhe out of control.

B. Worship is “kissing toward” the Lord.

There are several Greek words used in the New Testament to explain the emotion of worship. The most common is proskuneo. This word means “to kiss toward.” It is used fifty-nine times in the New Testament and is always translated “worship.” Without the prefix “pro,” the word simply means “to kiss.”

Proskuneo was an ancient custom of the Persians. They would bow down before a king and kiss the hand of the king to show respect and honor. The word eventually took on a metaphorical meaning, and thus, the physical action was dropped. When we come to the time of Jesus, proskuneo was used by Jesus when He said that the true worshipers (proskuneo) would worship the Father in spirit and truth (Jn 4:23). True worshipers would “kiss toward” the Father in spirit and truth in order to show awe, respect and honor.

One could physically bow down as a manifestation of honor without a heart of worship. However, one could not have a heart of worship without bowing down and “kissing toward” the King of all things. The soldiers of Pilate’s court proskuneo before Jesus at the time of His trials, but they did not worship Him (Mk 15:19). An outward physical expression of proskuneo, therefore, does not necessarily constitute worship. But when men come into the presence of God, it is only natural that they proskuneo. “Now when they had come into the house, they [the wise men] saw the young Child with
Mary His mother. And they fell down and worshiped [proskuneo] Him” (Mt 2:11). “You will worship [proskuneo] the Lord your God and Him only will you serve” (Mt 4:10). “Let all the angels of God worship [proskuneo] Him” (Hb 1:6).

C. Worship is a life-style of reverencing God.

The second most used word for worship in the New Testament is the word sebomai. This word is used ten times in the New Testament and refers to reverence, or to hold something in awe. The original meaning of proskuneo emphasized the outward manifestation of worship, while sebomai focuses more on the inward soul of man and his feelings of awesomeness in reference to his Creator. “Now a certain woman named Lydia ... worshiped [sebomai] God” (At 16:14). Titius Justus was “one who worshiped God” (At 18:7; see vs 13; compare 19:27). It was the nature of Lydia and Titius to worship God. It was not so much something that they did at a particular time, but something they were. Because they were sebomai in their hearts, they proskuneo before God.

D. Worship is giving service to the Lord.

The third word that is used in the New Testament in reference to worship is latreuo. This word means “to render religious service,” “give homage,” or “to worship.” In the strictest sense of the definition of the word reference is to the worshiper offering gifts or service in worship of God. “But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship [latreuo] the God of my fathers” (At 24:14). “For we are the true circumcision who worship [latreuo] God in spirit” (Ph 3:3; see Hb 10:2). In both of these contexts, the word latreuo could be translated “serve.” Because of one’s life-style (sebomai), he offers service to God (latreuo) by serving others. From the use of this word in reference to worship, we have developed the concept of “worship service” (More later).

From the definitions of the words that are used in the Bible in reference to worship, we would conclude that worship is inward, not outward, though it could be expressed in certain outward actions and behavior, such as bowing down in homage or serving in response to one’s worship of God. Such things as singing and praying are not worship, but only the outward expressions of an inward appreciation and adoration of God. When one partakes of the Lord’s Supper, one’s hands and mouth are used in eating and drinking. The partaking in eating and drinking is not worship. No action of man is worship in and of itself. One can certainly partake of the Lord’s Supper and sing without worshiping. One can help his neighbor in serving his needs without doing so in worship of God. When one worships, his worship is often expressed outwardly. We must
keep in mind, however, that one can wor-
ship without any outward expressions or
actions. Worship is internal. It pours
forth from the heart.

Worship is purely internal and men-
tal, and thus, it sometimes finds its ex-
pression in one’s behavior. This is the
essence of 1 Corinthians 11:29. “For he
who eats and drinks not discerning the
body, eats and drinks judgment to him-
self.” One can externally eat and drink
the Lord’s Supper, but have an inward
heart that is full of carnal feelings. If
one eats and drinks with a carnal heart,
he is not worshiping. Actions never cause
one to worship. But
worship can result in
action in one’s life. It
is for this reason that
external crutches that
are used to generate
worship in the heart,
as mechanical music, physical environ-
ments, solemn ceremonies, incense and
sanctuaries, often present a false sense
of worship simply because those who rely
on such external crutches have often not
given their hearts in worship of God.

They are often simply carrying out reli-
gious rituals that are confused with true
worship.

Worshipful saints can bring their
spirit of worship together in assemblies.
However, if our thinking is that we go to
the “hour” and “place” of worship, then
we have missed the point. Worship must
take place in an
individual’s heart
regardless of his
presence with oth-
ers. Unfortunately,
we live in a time of
Christendom
wherein “worship”
is too often confined to places, times and
assemblies. However, when we “walk
with true worshipers” in chapter 4, we
will discover that worship is a spiritual
characteristic of God’s people regardless
of where they are or what time it is dur-
ing the day. Worship warriors worship
God individually first. Worship with oth-
ers is a serendipity of the believers’ com-
mon fellowship with one another, and
when the believers have the opportunity
to be in one anothers’ presence.

Chapter 2

Worship: Who and How

We certainly live in a non-Christian
world of confusion in reference to man’s
worship, for men seem to worship every
imaginable god in every imaginable man-
ner. God created us to be worshipful be-
ings, and thus, we would assume that He
also revealed in His word both Himself

Thanksgiving
to God
is expressed
through
sacrificial
service.

True worship
cannot be
confined to
places or
limited by
performances.

and the worship He would accept. God
revealed Himself through the fathers of
extended families before His revelation
through written word (Hb 1:1,2). The
vast majority of the world, however, does
not believe the Bible. The result is a
world that is populated with people who
neither know God, nor have any desire to study His revelation to man in order to discover how He desires to be worshiped.

This would be true also of much of the world of Christendom wherein many assert to be “Christian,” but have no knowledge of the word of God. From a recent Barna Group report, an interesting point came forth from recent studies in reference to the religiosity of the American culture. “The Christian Church,” it was stated, “is becoming less theologically literate. What used to be basic, universally-known truths about Christianity are now unknown mysteries to a large and growing share of Americans ... especially young adults” (Dec. 13, 2010). In their ignorance of the word of God, many “believers” of Christendom would just as soon create worship after their own desires, assuming that the worship they create is pleasing to the God of whom they have little knowledge. As one ventures from one assembly of worshipers to another, he is confronted with an assortment of worship behavior, most of which is questionable in view of the worship that we find revealed in and defined by the word of God.

Simply because someone worships, does not mean that their worship is acceptable to God. There are too many warnings in the Bible concerning false worship to allow ourselves to be biblically ignorant of the word of God in reference to our worship of God as it is revealed in the Bible. It should be obvious, therefore, that if one claims to be a child of God, then he or she would search the Scriptures in order to understand how one would refrain from worshiping after the ordinances of man.

When we study the Bible in reference to worship, we must keep in mind that men do not need to be taught to worship God. Worship is a natural instinct of man because he was created after the image of God. It is for this reason that the Bible was not given as a legal manual for worship. From our study of the Bible, we do not learn how to be inspired to worship. We learn who to worship. When one learns who God is, he naturally worships in an acceptable manner.

A. The object of our worship:

As will be discussed latter, there is such a thing as vain worship (Mt 15:8,9) and self-made worship (Cl 2:20,23). Because there is worship that is not acceptable to God, sincere believers should be driven to know the true worship that is acceptable (Jn 4:23,24). The only way one can possibly understand who to worship, is to discover God through His revelation. Anyone who does not accept the Bible as the word of God, therefore, cannot worship acceptably the God of the
Bible. Though the one who is ignorant of the word of God will worship, he is never sure that his worship is acceptable to God simply because he does not know the God of the Bible.

In their ignorance of the word of God, men have worshiped the sun, moon and stars. Some have worshiped angels, or figments of their own imagination. But it is as the angel instructed John when John bowed down before him, “Worship God” (Rv 19:10; 22:8,9). John was not instructed to worship. He was instructed who to worship. Jesus reminded Satan, “You will worship the Lord your God and Him only will you serve” (Mt 4:10). In the Old Testament we have recorded history of how men worshiped the gods of Baal, Molech and a host of other imagined gods they created after their own imagination. All such worship was misdirected, and thus, it was worship that was unacceptable to God. In fact, the prophets chided the people for worshiping the created images of their imagined gods (See Is 10; compare 1 Kg 18:17-46).

Worship in its purest form is revealed by God in His word. Since there is no other Creator, then certainly the One who created all things would be the One who would be worshiped by the created. It is for this reason that philosophies as evolution destroy man’s desire to worship God. If we were not the result of a creating God, then we could conclude that we have no inward desire to worship a creator. When humanist stop worshiping the Creator, they start worshiping the creation (See Rm 1:18-32).

Since God revealed that imagined gods are false, and thus the worship of them is unacceptable, then we conclude that there is an acceptable way to worship God. It is the task of those who claim to be believers in the one true God to discover acceptable worship. Since God is our creator, then we would correctly concluded that He has the right to be worshiped according to His instructions, not according to our carnal desires.

B. True worship:

When the Samaritan woman encountered Jesus, Jesus’ conversation with her eventually led to a very profound statement. Jesus said, “But the hour is coming and now is when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such to worship Him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth” (Jn 4:23,24). Since Jesus said, “for the Father seeks such to worship Him,” then we must conclude that our worship of the Father is to be according to the definition of what Jesus stated, that worship is to be in spirit and in truth.

1. Worship in spirit: In the context of His statement, Jesus generally defined what He meant by worship in spirit. Worship in spirit is based on the fact that God is spirit. The obvious conclusion is
that God is not worshiped with the mechanical inventions of men. Regardless of the creation of man’s hands, God who is spirit cannot be worshiped with that which is the result of His creation. Nothing mechanical or material that is of this world, therefore, can be used to worship Him who is not of this world. Only that which is after the image of God, the spirit of man, can offer worship to the Father of our spirits (Hb 12:9). It is fallacious for one to claim to use something of this world in order to worship Deity who is spirit, and thus, not of this world. God did not create a physical world of instruments with which He seeks to be worshiped. He created the spirit of man that is in His image. Only by this spirit does He seek to be worshiped.

All aids one may use in generating a worshipful spirit within himself are of no value in worship of the God who is spirit. God is not listening or seeing those things that are of this world. As spirit, He is unconcerned with sounds or material creations that are the product of man’s hands. This is the thought of Paul’s statement to the Athenians. “The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands as though He needed anything, since He gives life to all, breath and all things” (At 17:24,25). Understanding this one statement of Scripture is enough to convince us that any efforts on the part of man to worship God with mechanical inventions, elaborate building structures, “holy” images, incense, or anything that is the product of this material world, cannot be used to worship God who seeks to be worshiped in spirit. Such things may be used by man to produce an atmosphere wherein man seeks to worship. But we must never forget that man must worship God directly from the spirit of his heart, not via something that is of the material world. How can the One who gives life to all be worshiped by that which has no life?

Worship of God in spirit is the foundation for Paul’s statement in Ephesians 5:19, that we speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, “singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” The one who is using physical or mechanical inventions to express worship must realize that God is not observant of physical structures, nor is He impressed with mechanical inventions. He is listening to the hearts of those who are using the instrument of their voices to speak praises to Him. God is thus worshiped with hearts, not with harps. Unfortunately, in many situations the harps have turned into an orchestra or band with amplifiers that hinder both the speaking of the saints to one another in song, as well as taking the place of voicing words of praise to God.
from the melody of our hearts. God can certainly hear the melody of the hearts above the obnoxious clanging of the mechanical instruments, but it is questionable whether the worshipers can accomplish audible teaching of one another through song when the worshipers cannot hear one another for the clamor of the instruments that are amplified through rock concert speakers.

Worship in spirit involves both attitudes and motives in the heart of the worshiper. It is worship that is motivated by a sincere desire on the part of the worshiper to pay homage to the Creator of one’s spirit. Physical things as mechanical instruments, sanctuaries, idol images and incense have nothing to do with the worship of one’s heart. Worshipers today may have become inept at stirring worship in their hearts without the aid of something that appeals to the senses of man. But true worshipers are not spiritually handicapped, and thus, they are not in need of any empirical crutches to generate an atmosphere or spirit of worship. True worship in spirit is spontaneous. It comes from the naked heart of man and is poured out individually and directly to one’s Creator and Savior, regardless of the environment in which one is or the sound that comes to his ears, or the images presented before his eyes, or the aromas that come to his nose. True worshipers need no empirical crutches.

God is a Holy Spirit, and thus, one must worship Him in the holiness of one’s spirit (See Is 1:15,16). He is a benevolent Spirit, and thus, those who worship Him must worship with a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving (See Ps 100:1,2; 122:1; 2 Co 4:15; Js 1:17). God as spirit reigns over all things, and thus He must be worshiped with a spirit of reverence and awe (See Is 6:1-5; Rv 1:12-18). God is a Spirit of wisdom and intelligence, and thus, He must be worshiped with the totality of man’s mental abilities (See Mt 15:5,6; 22:37). God is a Spirit that cannot be seen with the eyes of men, and thus, He must be worshiped in faith (See Ex 20:4,5; 2 Co 5:7). God is a loving Spirit, and thus, He must be worshiped with a spirit of love for Him and one’s fellow worshipers (Mt 5:23,24; 1 Jn 4:8,11,20,21). God is a fatherly spirit, and thus, He is to be worshiped as a child who trusts in and is dependent upon the Father of our spirits (Mt 6:9; Hb 12:9).

We believe in a God who needs nothing of this world in order to be worshiped by those who are confined to this world. If one would thus seek to worship God, then he must link through his own spirit with the God who is spirit. He must bypass all that is physical in order to transcend to Him who is pure spirit. The less one encumbers himself with that which is carnal and physical, the greater his access will be into a mental and spiritual realm wherein he can be touched by worship of God.

2. Worship in truth: Since all that
God is real and true, then certainly if one would approach God in worship, he would seek to understand the God he worships. We would assume, therefore, that God would reveal who He is in order that we worship Him in truth. The problem with men and their inventions of worship is that we often become subservient to our inventions within which we feel God desires to be worshiped. The inventions often take over and the worshipers become servants to their own inventions. This is the spirit of idolatry. The worshiper creates a god after his own imagination, and then, his imagination takes control of his worship. We also create worship crutches by which we seek either to perform or to create an atmosphere of worship. Our crutches then take over in that we cannot worship without the crutches.

Since God seeks to be worshiped in truth, we would correctly concluded that those who do not know Him because they are ignorant of His word would invent their own means by which they would worship Him. Those who have little knowledge of the word of God, therefore, submit themselves to a spirit of idolatry. The spirit of idolatry leads us to create gods we can understand and manipulate. Once we have created the god, then we assume that the god we have created in our minds seeks to be worshiped according to our own inventions. Throughout history, men have invented false gods and worship that appeals to the carnal desires of the worshipers. We would assume that this religious venture is common among those who claim to be believers, and yet have little knowledge of the Bible. The worship of the biblically ignorant, therefore, is filled with misguided practices that are contrary to the word of God.

When we lived in Brazil many years ago, we picked up the newspaper one day and read of how one “Christian” group had taken five or six of the babies of the church group, bound them, and drown them in the sea at the beach in worship. As we reel in horror at such an act, we must take a look at our own efforts to worship God. It is certainly innate within man to worship. But if his worship is not directed by God, then he will invent rituals, systems and ceremonies of worship according to how he believes his imagined god is supposed to be worshiped. Those who have had a history of spiritism, voodooism and animistic spirits in their culture, will often bring their former beliefs into the context of Christianity. They will thus worship God according to their religious culture, not according to the directions of the word of God.

From what Jesus said in John 4:23,24, we would assume that any worship that is not based on the word of God, is not true, and thus, not acceptable to God. It is for this reason that not all worship is pleasing to God. Simply because one worships, does not mean that
Worship: Who And How

his worship is pleasing to the God of the Bible.

It is not that God has prescribed a legal formula for acceptable worship. If God had prescribed expressions or acts of worship that must legally be carried out in order to validate one’s worship, then men would eventually conduct such expressions or acts as a religious ceremony with no worship at all. Once men legalize acts or performances of worship, they then make judgments of others that they are not worshiping God according to the prescribed legal system or ceremony of worship. This does not mean, however, that we cannot discover in the pages of the word of God expressions of worship that were carried out by faithful people of God. The expression of worship of some was what they offered according to the instructions of God, such as, animal sacrifices. Others simply fell to the ground in worship, offering nothing and performing no acts of worship. It is interesting to note that when Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for Isaac, the servant worshiped when he perceived that Rebekah presented herself at a well to give him water and to water his camels in fulfillment of his prayer to God (Gn 24:25). However, it is not stated if the servant bowed down, or closed his eyes, or raised his hands to heaven, sang a song, or even said anything. He simply worshiped when he perceived the providential work of God to provide a wife for Isaac.

When one seeks to be true in heart to God, then he will worship God in truth. Being true to God means that one’s life is given to God as His servant. We are servants to God, not in word, but in deed and truth (1 Jn 3:17). Through godly living, we seek to live as expressions of God to all humanity. We are thus directed as God’s sons by His word to live in service to all men (Gl 6:10).

Romans 12:1 is a key passage that opens a door concerning the worshipful service of the sons of God. “Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” The Greek word latreuo is here translated “service,” as it is also translated in Romans 9:4. The root meaning of the word is simply “service.” Some have assumed that all that we do is worship. This view has been assumed from statements as 1 Corinthians 10:31. “Therefore, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

There is a difference, however, between worship and service, though some service may be in worship of God. For example, you clean your house every day. The cleaning of your own house is only your duty for yourself, since you do not...
want to live in a dirty house. You do not clean your house in worship to God. However, if I clean your house it can be in worship to God. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:15, “For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.” Because of the overwhelming grace of God that I realize in my own life, I may be moved to clean your house in service to your needs. When I understand the mercy of God toward me, it is only reasonable that I serve you. In the true sense of the phrase “worship service,” I have worshiped God in serving you. The life of the disciple of Jesus is thus full of worship service, though not all the service that one might perform is worship.

A form of the word latreuo (latris) is used both in reference to service to God and men. A hired servant (latron) simply works for men. However, as a servant (latron) of God, we have given our lives in service to God (See At 24:14; Hb 12:28). The thought would be completed by Paul’s statement in Colossians 3:17. “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” This would be the lifetime nature of the reasonable service of Romans 12:1. One gives himself in lifetime service to God, but is not always in a continual state of worship throughout his lifetime.

We would question the teaching that worship in truth is a ritualistic system that is defined in Scripture and legalistically performed. If we set our theological course to discover in Scripture such a legal system of worship, and are honest with ourselves, then we will find ourselves to be inconsistent and frustrated. We will find ourselves divided as each Bible student comes forth with a greater or lesser number of acts and ceremonies of worship. We do not think that God would so frustrate His worshipers. We do not think that He would leave His people to their own deductive intellects in order to determine a supposedly true system of legal worship. If one’s worship is validated as true by a legal system of worship actions, then the newborn Christian is at risk until he discovers the correct actions to perform in order that his worship be true. If we can only understand this one point in reference to worship, then we can confess what irrational humbugs we often become when we go to war with our fellow brother over those things we propose to be correct performances of worship.

True worship is not validated by the performances of a worship formula. When Abraham left his three servants, he went with Isaac to a place to worship alone with his son (Gn 22:5). When the child of David died, he washed himself, changed his clothes, and went alone to the house of the Lord and worshiped (2 Sm 12:20). These and many other worshipers in the Bible did not seek to wor-
ship by some ritual in order that their worship be true. We must keep in mind that worship is simply vertical, that is, it is directed to God. It is individual, for it is individuals who pour out their hearts to their Creator. When men feel inspired and thankful to God, they worship. When any of God’s children seek to live true to their God, they worship in truth in that they do not worship after their own inventions. If a son of God is alone in a desert, he can worship without any mechanical crutches and without performing any acts of worship. It is ludicrous to assert that true worship is bound to or confined to the physical crutches of one’s environment or ritualistic performances. In fact, unless one can strip himself of all the modern performances, electronic gear, and sanctuaries wherein men seek to stimulate and “practice” worship, he will never learn the spirit of spontaneous worship in the solitude of being alone with God. If one seeks to learn worship again, he should look for a desert. That is where God sent great men as Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist and Paul in order that they connect with Him in true worship. If one cannot find a desert, then look for a closet (Mt 6:6). There are no mechanical inventions in deserts and closets. There are no rituals or acts of worship to perform. One is simply alone with God in the solitude of the environment.

One cannot worship God in truth unless he worships God in spirit. As a child seeks to obediently respond to a loving father, so the obedient respond in a worshipful spirit to the Father who loved them through the giving of His only begotten Son. This is the true essence of one’s individual worship of His Creator and guiding Father. In order to discover again the joy of simple worship of God, one must present himself to God in the simplest manner possible. Find a desert, or place of solitude in order to find God.

Chapter 3

Wayward Worship

God as our creator is the Father of our spirits that He created for every human being (Hb 12:9). It is the natural instinct for man to worship because he has been created after the spiritual image of God. It is for this reason that there are no commands in the Bible to worship. There is no need for the spirit-filled son to be commanded to pay homage to the Creator of his spirit. All commands in the Bible are in reference to whom we must worship, and how He seeks to be worshiped.

In the absence of a knowledge of who God is, men will seek out some object or some spirit to worship. God said of His people Israel in their state of apostasy, “My people are de-
stroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I will also reject you so that you will be no priest to me. Seeing you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children” (Hs 4:6). It was not that Israel became irreligious. They simply forgot the law of God, and thus, they created a religion that conformed to their own desires. And once they had created a religion after their desires, it was only natural that they create a god who would condone their behavior.

We could say the same of many today who have either forgotten the law of God, or who desire to have no knowledge of His law. Because they are worshipful beings, they create worship after their own desires. Both Jesus and the New Testament evangelists encountered such people in the 1st century. Our study of these encounters helps us to look to ourselves and those around us in Christendom in order to determine the true worshipers of God today.

A. Vain worship:

The word “vain” means useless. When associated with the word “worship” it would refer to worship that is useless in accomplishing the purpose for which God seeks, that is, worship that is pleasing and acceptable to Him. The historical encounter of Jesus with the religious leaders of His day is the only context in which Jesus used the phrase “vain worship.” The record of this encounter is found in both Matthew (15:1-9) and Mark (7:1-9). The following points that these two inspired recorders made in reference to Jesus’ pronouncement of their vain worship is both revealing and definitive:

1. Binding where God has not bound: In the context of this encounter of Jesus with the religious leaders, the Pharisees and priests observed that the disciples of Jesus did not wash their hands when they came from the market place (Mk 7:1-5). The accusation of the religious leaders involved a good practice, but it was simply a tradition of the Jews. They had religiously bound something on the people that God had not bound. Their tradition had thus become a religious law, and the occasion by which they judged if others were conforming to their religious structures.

2. Hypocritical behavior: The occasion of the rebuke of the disciples by the religious leaders presented the opportunity for Jesus to exhort these leaders concerning their behavior and religious traditions, specifically their vain worship. Though the washing of hands, pots and pans would not be considered “worship,” either by Jesus or by the religious leaders, the practice of binding where God had not bound in their religious behavior spilled over into their hearts, and thus, their hearts could not give true worship to God. They could not worship in truth because they were more concerned with their religious life-style of traditions than keep-
ing the commandments of God. Jesus thus referred to them as hypocrites, which reference was both to their behavior and to their worship (Mk 7:6). It is in this context that Jesus quoted Isaiah, whose initial message was to an idolatrous nation of Israel that had turned from God. “This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me” (Mk 7:6; see Is 29:13). We could paraphrase Isaiah’s statement by God to read, “These people make pronouncements of praise with their mouths, but they live contrary to My will.” If one is not true to God through an obedient life-style, then certainly he cannot worship God in truth. Those who refuse to obey the gospel, therefore, worship God in vain. The obedient demeanor of one’s life validates his worship before God as true.

3. Lip worship: We can understand Jesus’ rebuke of their “lip worship” in Mark 7:6 by His statement in verse 7. He was connecting their life-style to their worship. “Lip worship” was simply going through the acts of worship, but the worship was purely outward, for their religiosity was based on the doctrines and commandments of men. Their worship, therefore, did not come forth from an obedient heart that sought to pay homage to God. The religious leaders manifested an outward legal worship that was void of inner commitment to the commandments of God in all areas of their behavior. Their hearts were far from God simply because they had rejected the commandments of God.

4. Vain worship: Because their hearts were far from reverence for the will of God, their worship was constructed after the traditions of men. Though they performed what appeared to be worship of God, God considered their worshipful performances worthless. We would caution ourselves, therefore, when we approach God in worship. The worshiper must determined if his worship is according to what pleases him, or what pleases God. If one seeks to live according to the commandments of God, then his worship is not in vain. In Christendom today there are untold numbers of worshipers who banner their worship as pleasing to God. But if their worship is based on a religiosity that is after the doctrines and commandments of men, then their worship is vain.

5. Laying aside the commandment of God: Herein is revealed the origin of vain worship. We have found that many “Christian” churches who worship God care little for the word of God. And because they care little for the word of God, they are defensive about their worship. However, true worshipers are very sensitive to the fact that their worship pours forth from an obedient heart. In the context of the religious leaders whom Jesus encountered, these religionists cared little for the will of God. They were more concerned about maintaining their traditions than in honoring God through obedience to His commandments. Jesus’ conclusion and application to their worship is obvious. If one has little concern for the commandments of God, then certainly he
cannot worship God in truth. Those who willingly disregard the word of God in their behavior are worshipping God in vain. Jesus concluded, “All too well you reject the commandment of God so that you may keep your own tradition” (Mk 7:9). This statement by Jesus is what identified their worship as useless. It is very difficult for those who worship God with life-styles that are contrary to the will of God, to repent in order to worship God in spirit and truth. They have constructed a religious behavior after their own heritage, and thus, their search for the will of God is little, if not at the point of rejecting the commandments of God. Their worship tradition after the doctrines and commandments of men is often too strong to ignore in order to discover worship of God in spirit and truth. A religious heritage that is not based on the word of God will not lead one to worship God in truth.

B. Self-made worship:

There is a connection between the vain worship about which Jesus spoke in Mark 7:1-9 and the self-made worship about which Paul speaks in Colossians 2:20-23. The connection is that when religious people willingly reject the will of God, they will impose on themselves a worship that is after their own desires. Paul wrote, “Therefore, if you died with Christ from the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourselves to ordinances? Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle.” All these concern things that perish with the using, after the commandments and doctrines of men. These things have indeed a show of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and neglect of the body, but not in any value in restraining the indulgence of the flesh.”

As the religious leaders in the context of Mark 7:1-9, even the Gentiles had legally imposed on themselves religious rites, which rites and rituals were manifested in their religion. Paul’s immediate answer to such legal religiosity was not to touch, taste or handle. Such things would profit nothing in reference to salvation simply because they pass away with those who invented them. However, Paul did make a statement that should shock religionists today who would defend the legal religiosity about which he spoke. “These things have indeed a show of wisdom ....” We are reminded of the countless assemblies in Christendom where their is a “show” going on to entertain the audience. The band is playing and the stars are performing. Everything presents a show of religiosity and worship, but the show will terminate with the passing of the performers. True worship can never be a show, for shows are external. They are performed externally in order to excite the audience. Once the show is over, the audience goes home only with the expectation that there will be another show next Sunday morning.

True worshipers never involve Entertainment originates from outside. Worship originates from inside.
themselves in theatrical performances that appeal to the lusts of the ears and eyes. In theatrical worship, the actors perform in order to excite the audience, but the audience is not participating in the show itself. The supposed wisdom of the self-made religious performance may appeal to man, but we must not confuse such with worship. This is the deceptive nature of religious theatrics at are performed by a select few for the entertainment of the audience. It is not wrong to be entertained, but we must always keep in mind that entertainment is about us. Worship is totally about God.

Self-made religion is a show to man, not God. It is thus of this world. Some translations use the term “self-imposed” worship in the Colossians 2:23 passage. Show religion is religious behavior that the performers impose on themselves in order to demonstrate their religiosity before others. Such would be vain worship for it is man-invented and man-performed. It is external. It is not wrong to be entertained in a religious context with spiritual singing. However, we must understand that a performance for entertainment is not worship to the audience. We might assume that God is being worshiped while we are being entertained, but in entertainment our minds are focused on the entertainers, not on God.

Though the context of Colossians 2:20-23 is not specifically in reference to religious entertainment, we would caution ourselves about becoming involved in religious behavior that hypocritically gives the presentation that we are worshiping God, when actually we are “touching,” “tasting” and “handling” a self-made religion. We must keep in mind what Paul said, that such religious behavior may put on a good show, but it is according to the commandments and doctrines of men. Once the performers are gone, the show is over.

True worship of God is never over when men die. They only continue their worship in the presence of God. “The twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever. And they cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ‘You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and because of Your will they were created and have their existence’” (Rv 4:10,11). There is no show business in heaven.

(One might ask if it is wrong to motivate an audience with teaching through spiritual songs. In view of the mandate of Paul in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, the answer would be that teaching through song is a medium through which the people of God are to be edified. Paul instructed that teaching be accomplished through song. Singing to one another does not always mean that everyone assembled is to sing simultaneously. It is the gift of some that have been blessed with beautiful voices to minister exhortation and encouragement through song. If we discourage the vo-
cally gifted not to minister in song, then we would be denying them the right to use their God-given talent to minister to others by teaching in song. As a preacher, who has the gift to speak, has the right to use his gift to minister through vocal teaching, so the singer has the right to use his vocal gift to minister in teaching through song. As the preacher is not entertaining through his teaching, so the singer is not entertaining through his teaching by song.)

C. Ignorant worship:

The worshipers that Paul encountered in Athens were not like the religious leaders Jesus encountered during His ministry. The Jewish religious leaders had received the oracles of God (Rm 3:2). They had a history of God working among them. However, they rejected the commandments of God in order to keep their traditions, and by doing such, they brought vain worship before God. Those whom Paul addressed in the Colossians 2 context were seeking to manifest their religiosity by that which gave a presentation of worship, but actually, it was also self-imposed religious behavior after the commandments of men. In the context of Acts 17, Paul encountered those who had no revelation from God concerning who He was or how He was to be worshiped. They were thus worshiping unknown gods they had created after their own imagination. And because they were worshiping the creation of their imaginations, they had imposed on themselves self-made worship.

Paul stood up on the Areopagus in Athens and said, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious. For as I passed by and observed your objects of worship, I found an altar with this inscription, ‘TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.’ Therefore, the One whom you worship in ignorance, Him I declare to you” (At 17:22,23).

The Athenians had crafted many idols with their hands that portrayed the gods they had created in their minds. However, they were wise enough to understand that if the gods they created after their own thinking behaved according to their thinking, then their created gods were no greater than their thinking. They concluded, therefore, that there must be a God beyond the imagination of men. In coming to this conclusion, they fashioned an idol to “The Unknown God” just in case they offended Him if they did not offer Him worship. This was the true and living God they could not create in their imagination, but the God of which they were ignorant. Their worship of this God, therefore, was in ignorance, for they had no revelation from Him.

The Athenians were knowledgeable philosophers who reasoned that there must be a true God of the universe. They concluded what Paul assumed all men should conclude from those things that have been created. “For the invisible things of Him since the creation of the
world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and divinity, so that they are without excuse” (Rm 1:20). From the wonder of the natural world, Paul stated that one should conclude that there is a Creator. A design presupposes a Designer. Since something cannot come from nothing, then Something has always existed. The honest worshiper, therefore, would seek for revelation from the Designer, the Something that brought all things into existence. Worshipful men, therefore, who are honest in their worship of the “Unknown God,” will seek revelation from this God. Paul revealed this God to the Athenians. Through the revelation of the Bible, the same God is revealed today. Those who are ignorant of the Bible will continue in their ignorant worship. However, it is incumbent upon all men that they should grope after the one true and living God in their worship. Paul exhorted the Athenians, “And He has made of one man all nations of men to dwell on the face of the earth ... so that they might grope after Him and find Him, though He is not far from every one of us” (At 17:26,27).

From the statements that were made by Scripture in reference to vain, self-made and ignorant worship, we would conclude that neither is acceptable to God. It is necessary, therefore, that all men seek out the word of God and read concerning how God would be worshiped in spirit and truth. Those who are held in bondage to their own self-made religiosity will not begin this search. Those who are satisfied with the gods they have created in order to appease their own self-imposed religiosity will likewise not search the word of God for correction and guidance in matters of worship. Few who are satisfied with their own self-imposed religiosity will search for both the God of the Bible, and how God would have all men come to Him in worship through spirit and truth. Nevertheless, in view of the fact that God judges some worship to be vain and self-made, sincere believers should make every effort to discover worship that is acceptable to God. This worship is discovered only in the revelation of the God who seeks our worship.

Chapter 4

Walking With True Worshipers

We live in a religious world where men have invented every sort of religious behavior, from which springs every imaginable expression of worship. The worship of non-Christian religions is centered around man-conceived and self-imposed religiosity by which men seek to express homage to their gods. And in reference to Christendom, countless worshipers have burdened themselves with
a host of rituals that have either hindered, or led them astray from any resemblance of the worship that was expressed by dedicated saints throughout the pages of the Bible.

We have allowed our minds and behavior in worship to be twisted by our own inventions and desires. For this reason, that which we would call worship is often a state of mind wherein we are actually aloof, shallow, indifferent, cold, distracted, and in some cases, simply narcissistic. “Worship” is more often about what we want, our feelings, our emotions, our performances. We seek entertainment that we pass off as worship. We have thus invented in modern times a gimmick worship that is focused on either elaborate sanctuaries, organized ceremonies, theatrical performances, or everything combined in a theatrical production that generates the emotional frenzy of a modern rock concert.

We have been in assemblies where people were emotionally overcome, and subsequently lost all control over themselves. We have witnessed those who have rolled in the dirt, cried out uncontrollably, and in some cases, fell into a state of unconsciousness where they were totally unaware of reality. We have experienced vocal puppeteers who pull on the emotional strings of the weak in order to lead them into emotional hysteria in the name of Jesus. We do not view such as worship, but the cultic result of those who have lost all reason in reference to sobriety and self-control. Such assemblies in the name of Jesus have brought shame on Christianity by many in the unbelieving world who often view Christianity as madness.

In this chapter we thought it would be good to go back to the pages of Sacred Scripture in order to rediscover those who maintained their senses and worshiped God. In order to do this, we must follow those heroes of faith who poured out their inner souls in worship of God.

In taking this walk with faithful worshipers, we can examine ourselves in order to make our own judgments concerning our homage to the God of heaven.

One’s worship is not controlled or determined by others.

Since we live in a Christendom that seems to identify theatrical performances and uncontrolled neurotic episodes as worship, it would be good to allow the Holy Spirit through the pages of inspired words to define for us again the nature, essence, character and behavior of the worshipful believer. Only in this way can we understand the worship that is acceptable to God. We would, therefore, take you on this adventure, pointing out along the way some of the characteristics of true worship. In doing so, we must make some candid contrasts between the theatrical performance and emotionally charge cultic assemblies of today in the religious world that are substituted for the true worship we see in the Bible. Our purpose in walking with worshipers in the word of God is to return to the simplicity of worship in our efforts to discover true worship of our Father, worship that is in spirit and in truth.
A. Abraham worshiped:

It is recorded in Genesis 22 where God tested Abraham (Gn 22:1). He asked Abraham to take his only son and offer him as a burnt offering (Gn 22:2). There is no break in the context between the command of verse 1 and the action of Abraham in verse 2. Abraham slept the night, and then, he arose early the next morning in order to make his way to Moriah, the place where God designated that he offer Isaac. After three days’ journey, Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place that God had designated for the offering. In verse 5 it is recorded, “And Abraham said to his young men, ‘Stay here with the donkey. I and the lad will go there and worship. And we will come again to you.’”

They were in the wilderness and far from people. Abraham even asked the two young men who accompanied them to remain where they were, while he and Isaac went a short distance away in order to worship alone. He said to them that he and the lad “will go there and worship.” We should note that there was no fanfare stirred on the occasion. There was no assembly, no audience, and certainly no performers. Their worship was to be in the quietness of a secluded place. Their worship was to be only by the two in the solitude of the wilderness. They would retain their senses in worship.

It was a worship of faith on the part of Abraham, for he told the young men, “...we will come again.” Abraham indeed would carry through with the command to offer Isaac, for the angel had to stay his hand as he was about to thrust the knife into Isaac. However, the Hebrew Scriptures that the Jews possessed for centuries did not reveal that Abraham believed that if he did administer death to his only son Isaac, God would raise him from the dead (See Hb 11:17-19).

In Abraham’s worship on this occasion, he was giving up something that he dearly loved. He was worshiping by giving up his only son. Isaac was worshiping by giving up his only life. The purpose behind the command that Abraham offer his only son was that he, and the nation that would come from his loins, should never forget that a Father would indeed in the future give up His only begotten Son. Though there would be ten thousand angels who stood by and could have stopped the death, they remained at attention by the command of God while the Son of God willingly died that all men might live.

B. Abraham’s servant worshiped:

Abraham instructed his eldest servant in Genesis 24 to go to the house of his fathers in order to find a wife for Isaac, his son (Gn 24:4). In obedience to his master, the servant took ten camels for all the supplies that he needed for the journey, as well as gifts to give to

One can go to any place for worship, but worship is not confined to any place.
the one from whom the future wife of Isaac would come (Gn 24:10).

When the servant came to Mesopotamia and to the city of Nahor, he knelt down by a well of water outside the city. He then bowed down in prayer and asked God to lead him to the woman who would be Isaac’s wife. He asked of God that the damsel from whom he would ask water would be the one for whom he had journeyed. Even at the time he was making the prayer, God was in the process of answering his requests, for Rebekah was on her way to the well (Gn 24:15).

The events that immediately transpired resulted in the fulfillment of all that the servant had asked, and the subsequent accomplishment of his mission from Abraham. Rebekah offered him water and asked to water his camels. When asked concerning who she was, she responded that she was of the house of Nahor. Nahor was from the descendants of Abraham’s ancestors. When Abraham’s servant perceived all that happened in response to his mission and prayer, he was overcome, understanding that he was personally experiencing the work of God. “Then the man bowed down his head and worshiped the Lord” (Gn 24:26). His worship was in thanksgiving to God for making his journey successful. His worship was individual and in the presence of Rebekah who certainly did not understand what was happening. His worship came from within his heart when he perceived the providence of God in his life. His worship was personal and directly focused on God. All that we are told concerning his actions was that he bowed down his head. No ceremonies were performed. No assembly was called. He remained in control of his person. His worship was spontaneous. It was solemn, and where he was at the time, he recognized the providential work of God. Those who worship in spirit need only to perceive the work of God in their lives. They do not need the theatrics of others in their presence in order to be stirred to worship.

C. Israel worshiped:

Before the Exodus of Israel from Egyptian captivity, Moses asked Aaron to gather together the elders of Israel (Ex 4:29). Once they were gathered, Aaron told the elders all the words that the Lord had spoken to Moses concerning their deliverance. In order to confirm the words, Aaron did signs in the presence of the elders. “And when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel, and that He had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped” (Ex 4:31; see Ex 12:27). When the people heard the word of God and perceived that He was working on their behalf, they were moved to worship. When Israel was in the presence of God at Mount Sinai, they worshiped (Ex 24:1). When they saw the pillar of cloud at the door of the tabernacle, “all the people rose up and worshiped” (Ex 33:10). When men understand that
God is working in their lives, they worship in thanksgiving of God’s work. Worship results from men who are in awe of God’s presence in their lives. Worship results from the teaching of God’s word. The act of teaching is not worship on the part of the audience, though the teacher may be worshiping in service of God. The audience would be listening. The teaching of the word would inspire the audience to worship.

D. Joshua worshiped:

In Joshua 5 it is recorded that when Joshua was near Jericho he encountered the captain of the Lord’s army. When the captain revealed who he was, “Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped” (Ja 5:14). His worship was instantaneous when he recognized that he was in the presence of an angel who represented the Lord. His worship was individual. It did not depend on the presence of others. His worship was not expressed through any rituals or directed by anyone in his presence.

E. Gideon worshiped:

In Judges 7 Gideon was instructed by the Lord to put together a small band of brave Israelites in order to deliver Israel from the oppression of the Midianites. Gideon was doubtful of his commission, Gideon took one of his young men and ventured secretly at night into the camp of the Midianites. While listening secretly outside the tent of a Midianite who had a dream, Gideon secretly listened to another Midianite explain the meaning of the dream of his fellow soldier. The dream was that God would deliver the Midianites into the hands of the Israelites. “And so it was that Gideon worshiped when he heard the telling of the dream and its interpretation” (Jg 7:15). So there Gideon was, in the camp of the enemy, in the middle of the night, quietly with his fellow companion, and he worshiped. His worship was immediate, individual, quiet, and in a hostile environment. There was no fanfare, no assembly, no audience, and certainly no noise.

F. The Magi worshiped:

At the time of Jesus’ birth, wise men came from the East to Jerusalem (Mt 2:1). They had come from where they lived in order to worship the one they believed was the fulfillment of prophecy (Mt 2:2). “Now when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother. And they fell down and worshiped Him” (Mt 2:11). Their worship was in a house, solemn and poured out when they believed that the newly born babe was the promised Messiah. Again, there was no fanfare, calling for others, or generation of emotional hysteria. Their worship came forth from their hearts in their solitude presence of the Son of God.
G. A leper worshiped:

On one occasion during His ministry, Jesus came down from a mountain to a great multitude of people. In the midst of the great multitude of people, a leper came and worshiped Him (Mt 8:1,2). Though surrounded by so many people, one individual was able to worship alone. He was able to focus exclusively on Jesus in the presence of so many distractions. His worship was not generated by those who were around him, but in spite of their presence. One can worship regardless of those are around the worshiper. Worship does not depend on the assembly of people. Worship is always individual, regardless of the presence of others.

I. The disciples worshiped:

In Mark 6 it is recorded that Jesus walked on water (Mk 6:48). When the disciples beheld the marvelous incident, they were terrified and cried out. Jesus reassured them, “Be of good cheer. It is I. Do not be afraid” (Mk 6:50). They were in the middle of the night and in the middle of a storm at sea. It was indeed a terrifying experience. Matthew recorded that Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water” (Mt 14:28). And so Jesus commanded him. Peter was empowered by Jesus, and thus, he also walked on the water. However, Peter eventually stumbled in his faith as he neared Jesus. Nevertheless, Jesus reached forth and grabbed his hand as Peter was going down. They both then walked to and entered the boat with the other disciples. The storm was calmed. There was dead silence all around them. They were overcome with the moment. “Then those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, ‘Truly, You are the Son of God’” (Mt 14:33).

Jesus had brought total quietness to the sea. The disciples were alone with Jesus in the quietness of the moment.
Because of what they had just experienced, and realizing that they were in the presence of the Son of God, they were inwardly overcome with awe. They worshiped. There was no hysteria, no crying out in remorse or anxiety. We can only imagine the awesomeness they had in their minds concerning Jesus as they quietly bowed themselves to the floor of the boat to the One who had power over the winds and the seas.

J. Reverent believers worshiped:

On one occasion immediately after His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples. “And they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him” (Mt 28:9). At the ascension, Jesus was carried up into heaven in the presence of the disciples, “and they worshiped Him” (Lk 24:52). When Israel saw fire come down from heaven at the time Solomon dedicated the temple, “they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshiped” (2 Ch 7:3). When God reassured Jehoshaphat and the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem that their enemies would not overpower them, they worshiped. “And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground. And all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the Lord, worshiping the Lord” (2 Ch 20:18; see 2 Ch 29:29).

True worshipers are always in control of their mental facilities. Our perception of the awesomeness of God explodes in worship.

From the preceding, and many other occasions where people worshiped God, there are several things that seem to define worship. Worship is personal and individual. Worship can take place on any occasion and at any time. Worship is certainly not identified by ceremonies and performances. The worshipers simply fell to their knees, or prostrate on the ground when they realized that they were in the presence of Deity (Ps 95:6). When people perceived the providence of God, they worshiped. When people heard the word of God, they worshiped (Ne 9:3). When people experienced the work of God in their lives, they worshiped. Worship came from those with thankful hearts. Worship was not planned or programmed around any events or confined to any specific locations. Worship was not defined by any performance of actions or ceremonies.

Chapter 5

Worship Anywhere And Anytime

One of the most profound teachings of Jesus on worship is found in John 4 where the Samaritan woman encountered Jesus. At one time in the conversion, the woman perceived that Jesus was a prophet (Jn 4:19). In order to shift the
conversion from her sinful relationship with a man with whom she was living, the woman brought up the subject of locations of worship.

The woman was a Samaritan, a mixed race of people who were not true Jews, nor did they worship according to the restrictions of the Jews. As with the Jews, the Samaritan woman referred Jesus to the sacred place of their worship, which was “this mountain” (Jn 4:20). She also pointed out that the sacred place of worship for the Jews was Jerusalem. But Jesus changed the conversion to reveal what had always been true in reference to worship. Worship is not about places, but about people. It is not about where, but anywhere. And in reference to the established feast days of the Israelites when they brought their offerings to the tabernacle, and then later to the temple, worship was not about events and ceremonies, but about pouring out one’s homage to God at anytime and anywhere.

“Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem worship the Father” (Jn 4:21). In their apostasy throughout their history, the Israelites, after the manner of the idolatrous nations around them, sought out and designated high places to which they would go and worship (Jr 7:31). In their apostasy, they desired to be in a particular place and environment in order to worship their imagined gods. Being built on a hill, the temple also became a place of worship, which place was never in the plan of God. The temple was a concession of God to David, for God knew that Israel as a whole would be divided, with the northern ten tribes eventually going into Assyrian captivity in 722/21 B.C. God knew that the southern two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, with a remnant that had come out of the northern tribes after the Assyrian captivity, would gather around the temple of Solomon as a place to which they would take their sacrifices for worship. The Samaritans, who resided in the territory of the former northern kingdom of Israel, established their own place of worship. But in the context of John 4, Jesus revealed that the time had come when worship would not be confined to places. Worship had never been so confined. The hour had come when God’s people, whether Samaritans, Jews or Gentiles, would not worship God in the confinement of a physical structure, or a specific location. True worship would exist throughout the world in the hearts of those who would come to the Father in spirit and truth. The fact that Christianity would go into all the world necessitated that worship of Christians never be confined to specific locations. One lone individual in the jungle of Africa can worship God acceptably. One can worship in the wilderness as Abraham. One can worship in the camp of the enemy as Gideon. One can
worship in the midst of multitudes of people as the leper. Location has nothing to do with worship.

We go to places in order to worship. We build buildings in which to worship. We even go up to mountain tops to worship. It is not wrong to go to Jerusalem to worship, for such did the Ethiopian eunuch (At 8:27). However, neither the place, hour, nor environment define our worship. We are worshipful beings before we show up at the “hour of worship.” We show up at a particular place because we are worshipful people. If we were not worshipful people, then we would never show up. But we must keep in mind that places and sanctuaries do not define the worship of those who worship in spirit and truth. And thus, our worship is not confined to places of worship, ceremonies or acts of worship, or the “hour of worship.” All such things may result from our worship, but they do not define or confine our worship, for God’s people worship in spirit and in truth at anytime and anywhere.

We need to conclude by referring to a passage that is almost consistently used out of context in reference to the presence of God in our lives and our worship of Him. It is a passage that has nothing to do with worship, but is almost always used in reference to worship. Jesus said, “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20). This is not a statement that is used in reference to worship. It is in the context of judgment actions that are taken in reference to the one who refuses to hear the church concerning sin in which he is involved (Mt 18:17). If the passage were speaking of assembly and worship, then the poor brother who is alone in the middle of a desert or jungle does not have the promise that the Lord is with him in his worship. But such could not be further from the truth of God’s word or our worship. Our presence with two or three other people does not validate our worship. Neither does being alone restrict God’s presence with us as we worship by ourselves in the solitude of our own closet. God is where we are. He hears. He accepts our worship wherever we are in the world and whenever we pour out our hearts to Him in worship. God’s presence in our lives is not determined by an assembly of two or three who have gathered together. He is always present wherever we are. David concluded, “Where will I go from Your spirit? Or where will I flee from Your presence?” (Ps 139:7). The answer is nowhere!

We must conclude that true worship is free from physical and emotional addictions. By this we mean that one’s worship must not be dependent on anything outside the heart of man. We live in a world of religiosity where people in their religious behavior are addicted to many “worship stimuli.” Some cannot worship unless they are in a particular place where there is an atmosphere of “spirituality.” Some cannot worship un-

Our assemblies do not mandate the presence of God. God is there before we get there.
less they are stimulated by others, or instrumen
tal music. Others must have incense or a crowd of fellow worshipers. If one cannot worship as Abraham in a quiet place in the wilderness without a physical or emotional stimulus, then one should question his. A spiritual relationship with God is realizing who God is, what He has done for us, and what He will do in the future. One need not be addicted to influences outside one’s heart in order to worship God. Though one may be inspired to worship because of his surroundings, this does not mean that we must have special surroundings to worship. Surroundings of the created world will stimulate worship, but we worship regardless of our surroundings or what comes to our ears. We are beings of worship. We cannot help but worship the God of the universe.