A misty forest scene with a path leading to a bright light, surrounded by trees and fallen leaves. The path is covered in red and orange autumn leaves. Several large, dark rocks are scattered along the path. The trees are tall and thin, with some green and some yellowing leaves. The overall atmosphere is serene and spiritual.

What it means to Worship God

Introduction

Until the day when I meet Christ face-to-face, I will hold to, and seek to advance, the truth and conviction that there is nothing in this life that is more important and consequential than knowing the only true God. It has been my privilege to know Him since I was a child. Over the many years since those early days and simple faith, I have come to see that many people (this list is very long) have loved me well and have given me a deeper understanding of who God is and what it means to live in a covenantal relationship with Him. While I was rattled, and then stumbled, for four years following my studies in atheistic philosophy, the Lord was faithful to bring godly, world-class scholars into my life who led me out of the darkness and into the light of Christ.

Introduction

During that time, I was confident that I did not want to be deceived – by anyone. And so began a lifetime of learning - searching, listening, reading, studying, traveling. I am not quite certain when it happened, but I eventually came to the place where my belief was certain - that there really was a person named Jesus Christ who lived a perfect life, who died a horrific death on a Roman cross for our sins, who was raised bodily from the dead on the third day, and who ascended into heaven where He now sits at the right hand of the Father and reigns in power and glory. He is the incomparable Lord of heaven and earth, and there is none like Him. All other gods, philosophies, and worldviews are false and offer vain hope for either this life or the one to come.

Introduction

I hope this will help you understand why it was so important for me to give nine lectures on *What It Means to Know God* this past fall. Having engaged in conversations about God since I was in high school, I had spoken with enough people to know that many struggle with similar questions that need to be addressed in a serious way. And so, as you recall, we considered the subjects of epistemology and knowledge, the ways of knowing, the prerequisites for knowledge, divine self-disclosure, general and special revelation, biblical theology, common hindrances to knowing God and, finally, what it means to know God. I hope it encouraged you in your own faith and will be useful as you help others who do not yet know God.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Our focus during this series was to consider whether God could be known or not and, if He does exist and is knowable, then how could we truly know Him and to what degree. My argument continues to be that, while God is incomprehensible, He is also knowable – though never exhaustively. I maintain that the knowledge we have of God is not speculative but is an obedient acknowledgement of the will of God. Thus, it carries with it a corresponding way of life – the abundant life that Jesus promised to those who receive and follow Him.

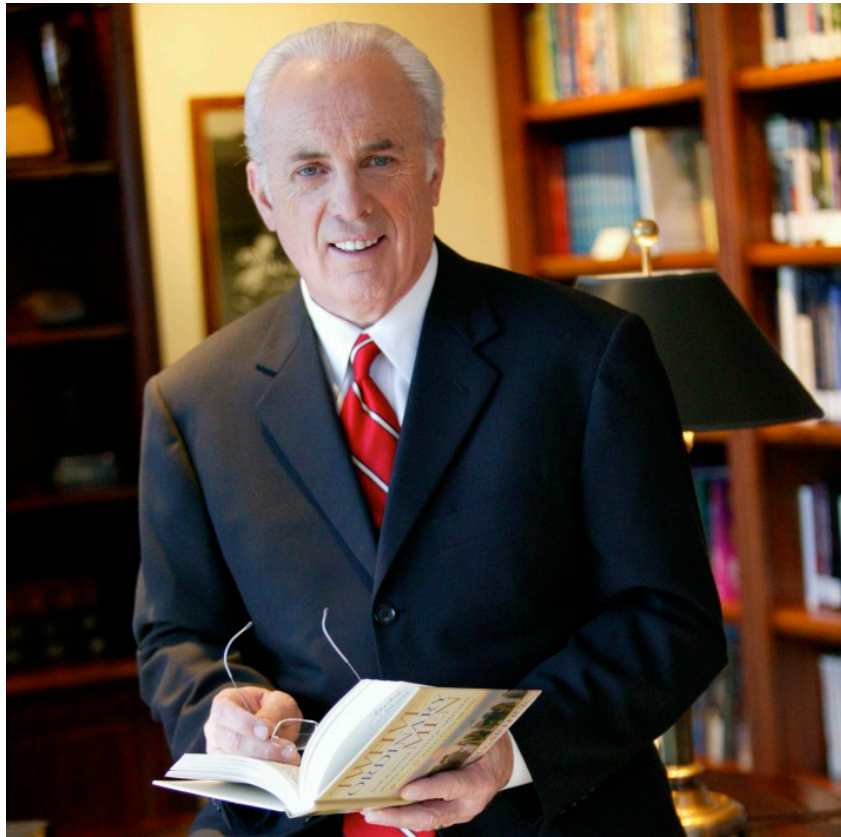
Out of His great mercy and grace, this majestic and holy God has spoken and disclosed Himself to us. According to His Word, He has invited us to come into His presence to worship and adore Him. Today, then, we will begin a 3-part series on *What It Means to Worship God*.



Why We Need to Learn More About Worship

1. Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.
2. We long to be pleasing to the Lord.
3. We are commanded to approach and worship the triune God as He prescribes. "God requires that He be worshiped according to His own word" (Rushdoony).
4. We want our experience of worship to be enriched.
5. We want to be transformed and made more like Christ.
6. We need a safeguard against idolatry in its many forms.
7. We realize that meetings and programs do not satisfy our souls.
8. Divine glory is more important than human need.
9. We need to be strengthened for continuing service in the world.

Why We Need to Learn More About Worship



John MacArthur, Jr.

Pastor, Grace Community Church, California

1939 -

“Perhaps the greatest need in all of Christendom is for a clear understanding of the biblical teaching about worship. When the church fails to worship properly, it fails in every other area. And the world is suffering because of its failure.”

Why We Need to Learn More About Worship



R.C. Sproul
1939 - 2017

“We are living in a time when there is a manifest crisis of worship in the church. It is almost as if we are in the midst of a rebellion among people who find church less than meaningful. They are bored. They see the experience of Sunday morning as an exercise in irrelevance. As a reaction against that, it seems that almost any church we visit is experimenting with new forms and new patterns of worship. This experimentation has provoked many disputes over the nature of worship.”

Why We Need to Learn More About Worship

“You become like what you worship. When you gaze in awe, admiration, and wonder at something or someone, you begin to take on something of the character of the object of your worship.”



N.T. Wright

Research Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity
University of St. Andrews, Scotland
1948 -



Worship According to the OED

- “To honour or revere as a supernatural being or power, or as a holy thing; to regard or approach with religious veneration.”
- “To revere as one would a being or power regarded as supernatural or divine; to regard with extreme respect, affection, or devotion; to adore.”
- “To regard or habitually treat with honour or respect; to honour.”
- “To engage in worship; to perform, or take part in, an act of worship.”



Our English Word: *Worth + Ship*

- ***Worship*** is derived from the English words *worth* (either the noun or adjective) and *ship*.
- The word *ship* was added to adjectives and past participles to denote the state or condition of being so-and-so. Such compounds were numerous in Old English, and many survived (or were re-coined) in Middle English, but few have a history extending beyond the 15th century.
- The only survivals of this formation now in common use are *hardship* and *worship* (Old English *weorþscipe*).
- “We worship that which is worthy” (Warren Wiersbe).

N.T. Wright on *Worship*

“Worship is not an optional extra for the Christian, a self-indulgent religious activity. It is the basic Christian stance, and indeed the truly human stance. ‘Worship’ derives from ‘worth-ship’: it means giving God all he’s worth.”



N.T. Wright

Leading English New Testament Scholar
1948 -



Worship in the New Testament

- The Greek word for *worship* is a compound word and is a technical term for the adoration of the gods, probably older than the Olympians. The deification of rulers began at the time of Alexander the Great and culminated in the worship of the Roman Emperors.
- Greek scholars Liddell and Scott define the N.T. word for *worship* as “to make obeisance; to fall down and worship; to adore; to prostrate oneself.”
- Almost three-quarters of the instances of this Greek word in the N.T. relates to the “veneration and worship of the true God and Lord or to that of false gods.”



To Blow a Kiss

- The Greek word for worship is a compound word, *proskuneō* [pros (toward) + kuneō (kiss) = to kiss toward (or, to blow a kiss)].
- Linguistically, there is no clear evidence to date that the reverently blown kiss to someone of higher rank was an original part of the gesture of the word for *worship* or not.
- Is it not ironic, however, that the Psalmist exhorts the kings and rulers of the earth: “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way” (2:12)? “To kiss is equivalent to do homage” (Keil & Delitzsch).
- Do note that there is “no doubt at all that the element of casting oneself to the ground has a prominence which cannot be explained by the combination of the two components of the term” (Kittel).

Examples of Worship in the N.T.

- **The Wise Men:** “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the East, and have come to **worship** Him...And they came into the house and saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and **worshipped** Him” (Mt. 2:2,11).
- **Jesus’ Command to Satan:** “Begone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall **worship** the Lord your God, and serve Him only’” (Mt. 4:10; cf. Lk. 4:8).
- **The Leper:** “And behold, a leper came to Him, and **bowed down to (worshipped)** Him, saying, ‘Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean’” (Mt. 8:2; cf. Mk. 1:40).

Examples of Worship in the N.T.

- **Jesus' Response to the Samaritan Woman at the Well:** “‘Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers **worshiped** on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to **worship**.’ Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you **worship** the Father. You **worship** what you do not know; we **worship** what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true **worshipers** will **worship** the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to **worship** him. God is spirit, and those who **worship** him must **worship** in spirit and truth” (Jn. 4: 21-24).

Examples of Worship in the N.T.

- **The Storm & Peter Walking on Water:** “And when they got into the boat, the wind stopped. And those who were in the boat (the disciples) **worshiped** Him, saying, ‘You are certainly God’s Son!’” (Mt. 14:33).
- **The Canaanite Woman:** “ She came and began **to bow down (worship)** before Him, saying, ‘Lord, help me!’” (Mt. 15: 25; cf. Mk. 7:25).
- **Resurrection Appearance to the Disciples:** “And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and **worshiped** Him” (Mt. 28:9).

Examples of Worship in the N.T.

- **The Gerasene Demoniac:** “And seeing Jesus from a distance, he ran up and **bowed down (worshiped)** before Him” (Mk. 5:6).
- **The Man Born Blind:** “He (the blind man) answered and said, ‘And who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you.’ And he said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ And he **worshiped** Him” (Jn. 9:36-38).
- **The Twenty-Four Elders:** “The twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will **worship** Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ‘Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God...’” (Rev. 4:10-11; 5:14; 11:16).

Examples of Worship in the N.T.

- **The Angels:** “And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and **worshiped** God, saying, ‘Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever, and ever. Amen’” (Rev. 7:11-12).
- **The Apostle John:** “And I John am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to **worship** at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. And he said to me, ‘Do not do that; I am a fellow-servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book: **worship** God’” (Rev. 22:9).



Worship in the Old Testament

- The principle Hebrew word used in the Old Testament for *worship* has the basic sense of “to bow down.” One part of the expanded definition gives us the meaning of: *to bow down, prostrate oneself, before a monarch or superior, in homage*. And the second aspect of the word means to *bow down to God in worship*.
- “The Old Testament idea is the reverential attitude of mind or body or both, combined with the more generic notions of religious adoration, obedience, service” (*International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*).
- “Worship as developed in the OT is the expression of the religious instinct in penitence, prostration, adoration, and the uplift of holy joy before the Creator” (*ISBE*).

The Commandment

“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not **bow down** to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Ex. 20:3-6; cf. Dt. 5:7-10).

A Call to Worship

- “But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house. I will **bow down** toward your holy temple in the fear of you” (Ps. 5:7).
- “Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; **worship** the Lord in the splendor of holiness” (Ps. 29:1-2).
- “**Worship** the Lord in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth!” (Ps. 96:9).
- “Exalt the Lord our God; **worship** at his footstool! Holy is he!” (Ps. 99:5; cf. vs. 9).

Who Will Worship the Lord?

- “All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you” (Ps. 22:27).
- “All the earth worships you and sings praises to you; they sing praises to your name” (Ps. 66:4).
- “May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him!” (Ps. 72:11).
- “All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name” (Ps. 86:9).
- “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!” (Ps. 95:6).

Old and New Testament Worship

“When you consider all of the words used for worship in both the Old and New Testaments, and when you put the meanings together, you find that worship involves both attitudes (awe, reverence, respect) and actions (bowing, praising, serving). It is both a subjective experience and an objective activity...True worship is balanced and involves the mind, the emotions, and the will.”



Warren Wiersbe
Pastor, Teacher, and Author
1929 -

Warnings Against Worshiping False Gods

- “And if you forget the Lord your God and go after other gods and serve them and **worship** them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish” (Dt. 8:19).
- “Take care lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and **worship** them; then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and he will shut up the heavens, so that there will be no rain, and the land will yield no fruit, and you will perish quickly off the good land that the Lord is giving you” (Dt. 11:16-17).
- “...the Lord will bring upon you all the evil things, until he has destroyed you from off this good land that the Lord your God has given you, if you transgress the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and **bow down** to them” (Josh. 23:15-16).

What Worship Should *Not* Be

- Formal and cold; dull and lifeless
- An honoring of God with our lips but not with our hearts
- A means to an end (i.e., to get something out of it)
- A place or an experience of receiving false teaching (e.g., supernatural prosperity, “name it-claim it” theology, health, wealth, a problem-free life, and/or “God wants you to be happy”)
- Entertainment
- Escape (e.g., leaving our burdens and problems outside the church)
- *Only* in spirit or *only* in truth (it is both/and).



A Profound Understanding of Worship

“Both for perplexity and for dulled conscience the remedy is the same: sincere and spiritual worship. For worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by His holiness; the nourishment of mind with His truth; the purifying of imagination by His beauty; the opening of the heart to His love; the surrender of will to His purpose – and all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable and, therefore, the chief remedy for that self-centeredness which is our original sin and the source of all actual sin. Yes – worship in spirit and truth is the way to the solution of perplexity and to the liberation from sin.”

- William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury (1942-1944)