

## WORSHIP PRACTICES OF THE CHURCH

Have you ever thought about **what you do** to worship? Have you ever thought about **why** you worship? The world is full of worshipers and worship. What does God think about worship and worshipers?

Hello I'm Larry Murdock. I preach for the Gandy church of Christ. Good morning and welcome to this program.

One word that describes "worship" is the word "Adoration." To adore something is to love it, to hold it in esteem. To esteem something is to count it as valuable. So we worship that which we count as of highest value. If we adore someone and esteem that person as valuable then we respect. To worship God is to respect Him, to reverence Him. "Homage" is the word we can use to describe the **practice** of worship. In other words, homage is adoration put into action. In "paying homage" we are giving service or practicing our duty toward a person whom we love and esteem. When a human spirit shows adoration for God then the result is worship. There is a song to God that says:

Sweet adoration flows from your children.  
Glory and honor and praise are a part of our constant devotion,  
Love set in motion for the Divine One who reigns in our hearts.

Here is a question for you: Does the God we worship allow human beings to pick and choose the things we do to show adoration? Are there worship practices that would be unacceptable to God?

Jesus' apostle Paul was writing about pagan worship practices when he warned Christians to "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them." You see, Paul was talking about the secret worship practices of pagan idolatry. Paul explained, "For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light." By the "light" Paul was referring to God's Word that exposes sinful practices. Worship practices taught by God ought not to fear public scrutiny because they are not sinful. Paul was referring to the worship practices of the mystery religion worshippers who practiced their worship in secret. Paul continued to urge the Christians to "Look carefully then how you

walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." ([Ephesians 5:11-21 ESV](#))

The Bible shows us that God has **not** accepted some worship practices, but has commanded certain other worship practices. That's right! The sons of the first man Adam are an example of acceptable worship and unacceptable worship. You may remember that the sons of Adam were named Cain and Abel. They both came before God to sacrifice offerings. In fact, that occasion is the first instance of worship found in the Bible. The Bible says that "In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard." (Genesis 4:3-5) For some reason God made a distinction between those two offerings. Cain was a farmer and brought produce from his garden. Abel brought the firstborn of his flock, and offered the whole animal with its fat portions. In the book of Genesis we are not told why God made this distinction between the worship practices of those two young men. However, thousands of years later an inspired author wrote about that episode and he gives us more insight into the problem with Cain's offering. The writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews, in chapter 11, verse 4, tells us that Abel offered his sacrifice by faith! That's right! Well what is it about "faith" that made Abel's worship acceptable? You see, faith comes by hearing. (Romans 10:17) Faith comes through the ears! That implies then that Abel and Cain **heard** instructions about what to bring in worshipping God. Those young men may have received God's instructions through their father Adam, or they may have been personally instructed by God, for in those times God spoke directly to people. For instance, after that worship service, God spoke directly to Cain about Cain's attitude. Cain did not seem to be surprised that God spoke directly to him. So the sons of Adam may have heard God give instructions for what to bring to worship. Abel did it! Cain did not! Abel believed God. You can see Abel's faith through his obedience to God's instructions. Thus Abel offered by faith. Cain did not believe God, therefore he disobeyed God. Evidently Cain did not take God at His Word. "So Cain was very angry, and his face fell," the

record says. Isn't that just like human beings?! Cain got mad because God would not accept his disobedience! Have you ever been angry with God because you were disobeying Him, and you hated that God would condemn your practice? Are you living with someone outside of marriage because that's the way you want it? And you hate to hear what God thinks about it? Are you angry with God because you are living in adultery? "The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, [that is, if you obey] will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it." (Genesis 4:3-7 ESV) Cain rebelled against God's worship practices and it was sin crouching at his door. Friends, it is true that there are worship practices that God **will not** accept.

Worship happens when particular actions or behavior express honor and devotion that arises in the human spirit and is directed toward the One we adore. And what we learn from Cain and Abel is that God requires a certain set of expressions of devotion. Human worship practices may or may not reflect God's desires.

What kind of worship then does God accept? God accepts those practices He has commanded! That's right! In different ages God has accepted different kinds of offerings in honor of Him. But that was because different kinds of sacrifices were commanded by God. This is how people knew to offer them. In the days of the Patriarchs those men sacrificed animals in their worship services. In the age when the people lived under the Law of Moses, animal sacrifices were also combined with other kinds of offerings to become expressions of worship that was acceptable to God. Patriarchal worship centered on an altar. Mosaic worship centered on the Tabernacle or Temple which God designed and commanded the people to build. Christian worship centers on the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross, around that which we call the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper elements are a memorial of that great event, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The unleavened bread stands for the body of Christ. The fruit of the vine, the juice of the grape, stands for the blood of Christ. The phrase "the Lord's Supper" occurs one time in the New Testament. (1 Corinthians 11:20)

In Samaria, Jesus had a conversation with a certain Samaritan woman about worship. The Samaritan woman brought up the subject of worship. She spoke of two practices of worship. Evidently, the Jewish people and the Samaritan people

were worshipping the same God who made heaven and earth. However, the people had two sets of worship practices, and two locations for worship. The Samaritan woman said to Jesus, "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." (John 4:19-20) The Samaritans worshiped on the mountain in Samaria called Gerizim. In fact Jesus was sitting at Jacob's well that was at the foot of Mount Gerizim. The Jewish people worshiped at the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus' response to this woman is quite revealing, and it concerned the "location" where and the manner in which worship could take place. Jesus said to her, "**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.**" (John 4:21-24 ESV) The woman and Jesus were discussing the location of worship. The woman was asking about which mountain. Jesus responded with a third location. The time had already come for people to worship God in their human spirit and according to truth. Notice that Jesus said that God is **seeking such people to worship him**.

WHY IS GOD SEEKING PEOPLE TO WORSHIP HIM IN THIS WAY? WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF WORSHIP? WHY DOES GOD DESIRE SUCH WORSHIP?

In the Old Testament book of Exodus I found an interesting episode in the life of the people of Israel that gives some insight into the purpose of worship.

Moses had led the people of Israel out of Egypt, across the Red Sea and into the Sinai Peninsula. There the God of heaven commanded that a tent be constructed for Him, according to a detailed pattern. That tent, or tabernacle, became the meeting place for God and Moses. "Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise up, and each would stand at his tent door, and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent. When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses. And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door." (Exodus 33:8-10 ESV) What were the people doing in the entrance to their tents? They were worshipping. They did not sacrifice anything even though

sacrifices were commanded of them at certain times and under certain circumstances. But at the circumstance of God coming down to speak with Moses these people stood in their tent entrances and worshipped in their hearts. Their adoration was expressed at the entrance to their tents. Each family felt that God was near them at the entrance of God's tent. Isn't that what worship is? Isn't worship all about God being near?

This idea of God's nearness comes up in the conversation between Moses and God. God's nearness was on the mind of Moses. "Moses said to the LORD, "You told me to lead these people, but you did not say who you would send with me. You said to me, 'I know you very well, and I am pleased with you.' If I have really pleased you, then teach me your ways. I want to know you. Then I can continue to please you. Remember that these people are your nation." The Lord answered, "I myself will go with you. I will lead you." Then Moses said to him, "If you don't go with us, then don't make us leave this place. Also, how will we know if you are pleased with me and these people? If you go with us, we will know for sure. If you don't go with us, these people and I will be no different from any other people on the earth." Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will do what you ask. I will do this because I am pleased with you and because I know you very well." ([Exodus 33:12-17 ERV](#)) Isn't worship about learning God's ways, so that we can please Him? For when we "please God" He will **go** with us; He will be **near** us at all times! Friends, this is the reason we worship God! We are "drawing near to God." We are entreating God to stay near us, to help us along life's way. We believe that God exists; and we believe that God will be with us if He is pleased with our lives, if we have followed His ways. Everyone who loves God wants God to be near at all times! We long for the nearness of God in all that we do. But for this to happen we know that we must find favor or grace in the eyes of the Lord. And God has made clear that the way to find favor with Him is to obey the Will of the Lord.

God did not permit His people to worship Him anyway they chose. For instance, God told the Jewish people: "You will take that land from the nations that live there now. You must completely destroy all the places where the people of these nations worship their gods. These places are on high mountains, on hills, and under green trees. You must smash their altars and break their memorial stones into pieces. You must burn their Asherah poles and cut down the statues of their gods. Wipe out everything that would remind you of those gods. "You must not worship the LORD your God in the same way these people worship their gods. The

LORD your God will choose a special place among your tribes. That will be the home for his name. You must go to that place to worship him. There you must bring your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, one-tenth of your crops and animals, your special gifts, any gifts you promised to him, any special gift you want to give, and the first animals born in your herds and flocks. You and your families will eat together at that place, and the LORD your God will be there with you. You will enjoy sharing the things you worked for there. You will remember that the LORD your God blessed you and gave you these good things." ([Deuteronomy 12:2-7 ERV](#))

Assemblies of worshipers – "When you come together..." (1 Cor 11:20) The Jewish feast of unleavened bread was held once a year and it featured all the people coming together in what was called a "holy assembly." (Exodus 12:16, 17) Even angels are said to assemble to praise God. (Psalm 89:5) Even those who have died are called the "assembly of the dead" in Proverbs 21:16. The Jewish word "synagogue" means "coming together." And very soon the place where these people gathered became known as the synagogue. This is very much like the Church today when the place where Christians gather together has become known as a "church." Of course, the "church" is NOT a building. But most often a building is used for the church to come together. The word "church" in the New Testament is translated from a Greek word that means "to call out." That is, to "call" people "out" into a gathering place. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians the apostle wrote at length about what Christians should do when they come together into an assembly. And it is interesting to note that Paul was addressing some things that take place in worship. For instance, in chapter 11 of 1 Corinthians the apostle corrected an abuse of the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper was the center of Christian worship services and the Corinthians were doing it wrong. In fact, Paul wrote, "In the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. ([1 Corinthians 11:17-18 ESV](#)) Furthermore, Paul said in verse 20, "When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk." In other words, some of the people had nothing to eat or drink, and yet someone else in the assembly had excess, even so far as to become drunk! ([1 Corinthians 11:20-21 ESV](#)) Paul said, this is NOT the Lord's Supper you are eating!

Over in chapter 14 of 1 Corinthians the apostle Paul talked about what was happening when the whole church came together in one place. There was singing and praying. There was also preaching and teaching. The teaching came from the Holy Spirit and was called prophesy. There were also people in the Corinthian church who could translate the prophecies into different languages. There were also people who could translate foreign languages by the power of the same Holy Spirit of God.