Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

True Worship, Part 1
Scripture: John 4:20-24
Code: 2004

Let's bow in prayer. Father, as we come now to the study of the Word of God, we pray that the Spirit of God might give us entrance into the truth that we might see and hear and understand, that we might respond with obedient hearts, for Christ's sake. Amen.

I would like you to take your Bible and look with me for a moment at John's gospel, chapter 4. John's gospel, chapter 4. And I would like to read verses 20 through 24. And this text is going to be the touchstone for our study of worship. We'll be coming back to it intermittently and then finally in a very in depth study, because I believe John 4:20 to 24 is the most significant New Testament passage on worship, and we must understand its truths if we are to understand our subject at all. The conversation is between the woman of Samaria and our Lord Jesus Christ. And she says: "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and Ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, 'Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth. For the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.'" The word worship appears in one form or another eight times in that passage. It is essential that we understand what our Lord is saying here, and we will, I trust, by the time our series is finished.

Now, when you came here this morning you came to what we call "The Fellowship of Worship." And you came into a building that we call "The Worship Center." Four years ago, or so, when we were building this building, and had finished it, and I was trying to decide what could we call it? All kinds of options were presented. We could call it an auditorium, but that has no distinction at all. We could call it the sanctuary, but that doesn't make sense because God doesn't live here. We had other suggestions which I'll leave unsaid as to what we could call it. But I felt that the best possible name would be the Worship Center, because when you come here you come for the primary purpose of worshipping God. And you not only come to the worship center, but you come to the fellowship of worship. And when the choir sings, and the musicians play, and the sermon is preached, it is not that those are an end in themselves; those are but stimuli. And their design and intention is to cause you to worship God. And if you have any less than that in your mind, you've missed the point.

I'm afraid that most people come to church for what they can get. There are some people, you know, who just check the church page and see who's playing where on a given Sunday and go for what

they think will appeal to them, or quote-unquote, “Bless them.” If you come to church for what you can get out of the music, or what you can get out of the sermon; if you come to church for the fact that you’d like to get blessed, you’ve missed the point. You really have, you know. Because we’re here to worship God, and that’s giving, not getting. We come to offer to Him something, not to receive. Granted, if we offer to Him the praise due His name, we will receive at His hand. For the Bible says in the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, “It is more blessed to,” what? “Give than to receive.” So, there is blessing in giving, much more than if you just come to receive. If you came just to analyze the music, or just to analyze the sermon, and if your response is, well, I’ve heard better, and I’m sure you have, at least in the case of the sermon, you’ve missed it. All we are doing is prodding your heart to worship God. And if your heart is in tune with God, frankly, it should take very little prodding, very little.

Worship. Do you do it when you come? I mean, is that what you have in mind? Do you prepare your heart for worship? When you’re getting dressed and getting in your car and proceeding on your way to this place on Sunday, is it that your heart is eager to worship God? Have you ever asked yourself that question? Well, you’re going to have to ask yourself that question in this series. And I’m going to tell you right in the very beginning what my purpose is: I want to really back you into a corner and force you to make a decision about whether you’re going to worship God or not. And that’s really what a preacher is for, you know. Force people to make decisions.

There are all kinds of views of the preacher, and I’ll confess which one I take of myself in the process of explaining this. The first one is the ritualist. Some of you come maybe from a background of a more ritualistic church where the preacher’s role is just another ten minutes in the liturgy. He does his thing like everybody else. And then, there’s the role of the preacher as the foreman. He just comes in and browbeats everybody and intimidates everyone. And then there’s the huckster, who uses the pulpit to sell his latest enterprise, or to promote his latest cause. And then, there’s the professor who just dumps information unrelated to life.

But, I would like to think of myself as a persuader. And the objective of this series is to make you think, first of all, about what worship is; secondly, whether you’re doing it or not; and thirdly, if you’re not, will you? And if you won’t, then you’re going to have to deny what the Bible says. That’s the objective of preaching: to force you to the corner where you have no other alternative than to do what God says, or not do what He says, and know clearly what you’ve done. So, worship is incumbent upon us and I believe we’re going to see some things that perhaps we’ve never seen as clearly before.

Now, what is worship? Let me give you a definition, to start with, now that I’ve gotten your attention, I hope. What is worship? Very simple definition, are you ready for this? Honor paid to a superior being. Honor paid to a superior being. That’s worship. A very simple word to define. It means to give homage, honor, reverence, respect, adoration, praise, glory to a superior being. Frankly, the word in the Scripture is used indiscriminately; it’s used of people who gave that kind of homage to idols. It’s

used of people who gave that kind of homage to material things as well as to the true God. So, the word in itself is not a holy word as such. It only describes honor given to a superior being. The common New Testament word, and there are several that have implied in them the idea of worship, but the most common one is the word *proskune*, which means to kiss toward, and it came from that ancient custom of kissing the hand of a superior, a person bow down on the ground, bow his head and kiss the hand. It also is used to convey the idea of bowing down, or prostrating oneself. And it is the idea that you prostrate yourself before a superior being with a sense of respect and awe and reverence and honor and homage.

And in a Christian context we simply apply that to God. We bow before God. We prostrate ourselves before God. We kiss the hand, as it were, as the Psalmist says, “Kiss the Son.” We bow in respect and honor before God, paying Him the glory due His superior character.

Essentially then, worship is giving. It is giving honor and respect to God and that is why we gather here. We don’t gather here to give respect to the preacher, or even the people who participate in the music, although it is fine that we should hold one another in respect. At this point in our experience as Christians, all of us fade and we are here for one purpose and that is to give honor to God. And through all that occurs, there is to be the stimulating of that desire in our hearts to honor God. So, if you come for what you can get, or if you come to quote-unquote, “get a blessing,” you’ve missed it. You have come to give, not get. And worship is a consuming desire to give to God. And it first begins with the giving of ourselves, and then of our heart attitudes, and then of our possessions.

Let me see if I can’t illustrate a couple of places in the Scripture of this thought. Exodus chapter 30 provides a graphic illustration, I think, of worship. In Exodus chapter 30, we are hearing the instruction given by God for the worship of the tabernacle. And God had given them clear instruction about how worship was to be carried on in the tabernacle, and there were many things that were a part of that instruction that had great symbolic value, they were great teaching tools. They were Visual aids. One of them is described in the 30th chapter and verse 34, and I think this is a wonderful, wonderful insight. “The Lord said to Moses; Take unto thee sweet spices, stacte, onycha, galbanum.” And those were available elements in that part of the world. “These sweet spices with pure frankincense: and of each there shall be a like weight.” Four components in equal part. “And make a perfume, a perfume after the art of the perfumer.” Use all of the skills that it takes to take those spices and make them into a perfume, “Tempered together, pure and holy.” Holy being unique, separate, untouched by any other element. “And thou shalt beat this very small and put it before the testimony in the tabernacle of the congregation where I will meet with thee.”

Now, God says, get this perfume all put together and put it in the tabernacle where I’ll meet with thee. “It shall be unto you most holy.” Now, here is a concoction, a perfume, a sweet smelling incense is what it really is, it’s incense. And it is to be holy. That is, it is to be only used for this purpose in the tabernacle. Look at verse 37, “And as for the perfume which thou shalt make, ye shall not make to

yourselves according to the composition thereof: it shall be unto thee holy for the Lord." You can't make any for your own use. You can't have any personal perfume of this particular recipe. And, verse 38 says if you do make it for yourself, to smell it for yourself, "You will be cut off from God's people."

Now, did you know there was a perfume recipe in Bible? And did you know that it was probably the most lovely fragrance imaginable? And that God said it could cost you your life if you ever made any of this for yourself? You say, well, what in the world is the point? The point is this: here was a fragrance designed to be only for God and when this incense rose to God's nostrils, it was unique to Him. You say, well, what does it picture? It pictures worship. That unique gift, that fragrance that rises out of the heart to the living and glorious God, and it is something that is to be offered to no other person. It is to be used for no other purpose. It is to be a unique, separated, sanctified, holy act that rises out of the heart of the person to the very nostrils of God. It is symbolic of worship. "When you come to meet Me there, let there rise from you something that is holy and only Mine."

Now, believe me, beloved, there are many things that go on that people think are worship, but they're not. There is certain kind of music that makes us feel like we are worshipping, because of the lilt of it, and because of the style of it. And it gives us a feeling of peace and maybe a few goose bumps. But the fact is that it may well be that that same style of music, that same mood of music with words that were totally without God could affect the same emotion in us. That's not worship. Worship is that which is distinctly and only for God, and which while capturing the most profound of our emotions does so by the most profound divine truth. We are to worship God as a sweet smelling offering, and that was to be the expression in symbol in the worshipping place, the tabernacle.

Now, in the New Testament, I would like you to look at John chapter 12 verse 1. And I want to show you a similar thought. As the incense fragrance rose to the nostrils of God, it signified worship. And here we have another fragrant gift offered in worship. This time, to the living God in human form, the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 1 of John 12: "Jesus six days before the Passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was," who had been dead, whom He raised from the dead. "And there they made Him supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with Him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly." How costly? Probably a year's wages for just that amount. "And she took it and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment."

First Corinthians chapter 11 says: "The glory of a woman is her hair." And so, she uses her glory for the lowliest task imaginable. Anybody in that part of the world who washed people's feet would have been thought of as the most menial slave. She uses that which is her glory to wash the dusty, dirty feet of Jesus. And doesn't just use water, but pours out the costliest fragrance. Now, that's the essence of worship. Worship is self-humiliating, and worship is profuse in its giving. And you remember that Mary and Martha were different. Martha was always serving and Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus and Jesus said, Mary has chosen the what? The better part. And Judas said, wait a

minute, that's 300 denarii worth of ointment and we could have given to the poor. He didn't really care about the poor; he held the bag and wanted as much as he could get out. But Jesus said, "Let her alone." Let her alone. It is better to worship than to give welfare. That's right. What you give God is infinitely more important than what you give man, any man. That is not to say it's not important to give to men; it is to say it is important more so to give to God. And we tend to be so pragmatic. We are the generation of the Marthas, aren't we? I mean, I've got the church fine tuned to a system, and we've got the programs and the whole shot. We are the busy ones. We are not the generation of the Marys.

And we are very careful that we don't waste our substance and we tend to mark out very carefully, even what we give God, rather than to pour out that which is a year's wages, and stoop in humility to wipe His feet with our hair. That's worship. And rising out of that fragrance was the essence of a worshipping heart. That's what God's after. True worship is better than welfare. True worship is better than religious activity, though it be good. And welfare is necessary, and so is activity, but worship is better.

And yet I fear that many of us don't even know what worship is. I suppose we could compare worship with ministry and help to distinguish it a little. We are very ministry oriented, aren't we? We talk about ministry. We function in ministry. We're very busy and active. In fact, we were talking the other day about why it seems that as our church has grown, and we continue to grow, and 60 or 70 new members are added to the church every month and more and more people keep coming. But it seems as though while we've been growing numerically, we have many more people than we've ever had, we don't necessarily have more people here on Sunday. And the answer is inevitably, well, you see, they're so active, they've got home Bible studies, and they've got this, and they've got that, and so, yeah, you know, we've got a whole bunch of Marthas. But where are those sitting at the feet of Jesus, where are the worshippers?

It's so easy to say, Well, I came the last three weeks in a row, you know, I've got enough and I'll get what I need to get out of the tape. Oh? Is that what you're here for, to get? Are you here to get from John MacArthur? Then, John MacArthur's failed, because I'm here to give to God the glory. This is the time to worship in His assembly. And you can't get that out of a tape recorder. Maybe you can be stimulated there, but not as in the corporate assembly of the believing people. We are so busy that we don't worship as we ought. And I think it is not just that we are so busy, it's that we are so careless and indifferent to the true character of worship. And we'll see that as we go through our study.

But let's compare that ministry concept with worship. Ministry is very important. We have to have that. But ministry can be looked at in this way: ministry is that which comes down to us from the Father through the Son, in the power of the Spirit, to one another. God, through Christ, by the Spirit, gives to us spiritual gifts to minister to one another. Worship is the opposite. Worship starts from us, by the Holy Spirit, through the Son, to the Father. And both are in perfect balance. There must be worship. God seeks acceptable, true spiritual worship. Did you get that sentence? God seeks acceptable, true

spiritual worship. Every one of those words is critical, and you're going to understand, I hope, each word by the time we're done in its fullness. God seeks acceptable true spiritual worship.

In John 4, the text we read at the beginning, verse 23: "The hour cometh and now is when the true worshippers," underline that, "true worshippers," that's the theme of this text, "shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth for the Father seeketh such to worship Him." For the Father seeketh such. God seeks acceptable true spiritual worship. Now, if we're going to give Him that, we have to know what it is, and we ask ourselves the question: what is acceptable, true spiritual worship? And I want you to ask yourself that question, do I worship God? Is that a priority for me? Do I come faithfully, regularly with a deep heart commitment to worship God? Not to hear a sermon, you can buy a tape, stay home; but to worship God. Am I so consumed with that hungering desire to worship God that I hurry myself into the assembly of His people? For the expression of worship?

And I know you come. I know your bodies are here. I see them, and a fine group of bodies they are. And I don't depreciate that. Your bodies are here, but I wonder if your souls are here in true worship.

It reminds me of the story I was reading about a missionary who was in the upper Amazon jungle. And this particular missionary was just consumed with this desire to reach another tribe in another area. And so, he got a group of natives to transport all of his goods and materials to this new area. And in his zeal, he was just pushing them beyond what they could sustain. Two days he drove them through that upper Amazon jungle, just in a fury. And they slept a few hours, and awoke the third morning, and not one native moved. And he said, "We've got to go, we have to move. Get up, we're on our way." And they never budged. And he went to the chief and he said, "Chief, you have to do something. We have to get them moving." The chief in his simple way said to the missionary, "My friend, they are simply waiting for their souls to catch up to their bodies." And maybe God has been waiting a long time for your soul to catch up to your body. Your body's here. Is your soul here? Are you worshipping in spirit?

In Psalm 45 verse 1 there is a most interesting statement. You don't need to look it up; it's just a simple statement I can quote to you. It says: "My heart is bubbling over with a good matter." And that's a Psalm of praise, you go all the way down to verses 10 and 11 in that Psalm, and it's a great praise. And the Psalmist is saying, "My heart is bubbling over," and the Hebrew is the idea of something boiling over. And that is really, I think, in a wonderful way what captures the thought of worship. Listen, worship is a heart so warmed by the truth of God that eventually it boils over in praise. You see? It is the heart so warmed by the truth about God that it boils over in praise. That's the real stuff of worship. Well, I hope that's a definition you can comprehend. And you'll find it further defined as we go through.

Now, I want to come to a one major point, and I'm going to give you several major points through this series. This is the first one: the importance of worship. The importance of worship. We'll talk about the

object of worship, the nature of worship, the effect of worship, and so forth. But to begin with, the importance of worship. And I want to talk about that this morning and then again tonight. I want you to understand how important it is, and I want to lay it on your conscience so you cannot be indifferent to it without being directly in defiance of God.

Now, worship is important for four reasons, four reasons. Reason number one: Scripture demands it, Scripture calls for it by the very volume of Scripture. You might even use the phrase Scripture is filled with it. Worship is important because Scripture is filled with it. Secondly, all of life is affected by it. All of life is affected by it. Thirdly, it is the major theme of redemptive history. It is the major theme of redemptive history. And fourthly, it is commanded. It is commanded. And that's a more explicit way of saying number one.

Let's look at number one, and tonight we'll go through the rest. The first reason that we say that worship is important is because Scripture speaks so frequently of it. The Word of God literally repeats, hundreds and hundreds of times, the emphasis on worship. And we can pick out a few select portions, and these are simply selections out of a mass of biblical material. Now, the entire book of the Psalms would be a good starting place.

But let's go back to the 20th chapter of Exodus, and let's see when God began to lay down some standards and some principles and some guidelines, some commandments, statutes, ordinances, laws, propositions. What was it that was most important to Him? God gives the Ten Commandments, the Decalogue, the priority of His desire for man's obedience and here it starts. God said, verse 2 Exodus 20: "I am the Lord thy God, who have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any 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. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of them that hate Me: And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My commandments."

Now, the first commandment is to worship God and God alone. That is it. In the 34th chapter of Exodus and verse 14, this is even more explicitly stated. And here it says: "For thou shalt worship no other god: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God." Worship then is the first commandment. That becomes for us the priority then. In Matthew 22:37 where the young man came to Jesus and said, "What is the first and great commandment?" The Lord said this, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, mind and strength." This is the first commandment. What is the first commandment? Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, mind and strength. That is simply the positive side of the negative in Exodus 20. The negative in Exodus 20 says, "Thou shalt not have any other gods." The positive in Matthew 22 say, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, mind, strength." That's the priority for man's existence. Man is made to

worship God.

Now, when God called out His people, He established in the midst of their life a worshipping place so that they might focus on that. Look at the 25th chapter of Exodus for just a moment. And God gave them all of those instructions, you know, to build that place. Have you ever studied the instructions of the tabernacle? Just really amazing. As they moved out of Egypt and they began to wander in the wilderness, God was calling them to worship. And so, God put in the middle of the camp this tabernacle, this tent. It takes seven chapters in the Bible, 243 verses, for God to give all of the standards, and all of the measurements, and all of the furnishings that were to be a part of that place. 243 verses. It's kind of interesting when you think that God gives the whole creation of the universe in just 31. God really is concerned with worship.

And in giving that whole prescription for worship, the whole intent of it was that they might focus on God. The tabernacle itself was ugly. It was ugly. I mean, it was not pretty to look at. But inside the tabernacle was a holy place, and inside the holy place was a holy of holies, which was a perfect cube. And inside the holy of holies was the Ark of the Covenant. And on top of the Ark of the Covenant was what was called the mercy seat where the high priest once a year sprinkled blood as an atonement for the sins of the people. And on the mercy seat dwelt the Shekinah glory of God. And so, really, the tabernacle was called that because it was where the glory of God dwelt: tabernacle. And the camp of Israel was all around it, and their whole life was looking in in focus on that tabernacle. In fact, when the tabernacle was completed, the glory of God came out of the sky and came right down and dwelt there so that the people would know that the glory of God was there.

Now, in Exodus 25:22 we read this: "And there I will meet with you, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things, which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel." God gave them a worshipping place. Did you know that in the tabernacle there were no seats? You didn't go there for a service. You didn't go there for a concert. You didn't go there for anything other than to worship God. If you had a meeting, you had it somewhere else. That was a worshipping place. And it was more important to have a worshipping place as a focus than a meeting place. And in the middle of that worshipping place was God, revealed in His presence in the Shekinah glory on the mercy seat between the wings of the cherubim and God says, I'll meet you there. Worship was the priority. God met His people there.

And if you read the book of Numbers in the first, at the end of the first chapter, the beginning of the second chapter, and you read how God laid out the people around the tabernacle, it's most fascinating. The Bible tells us, I think it's Numbers 1 about 52 or 53 verse, that right outside the tabernacle, nearest to the tabernacle were the priests. This is the camp, the encampment of Israel for all the 40 years they wandered, that the priests were the nearest, and then just beyond the priests were the Levites. Now, the priests were in charge of what? Worship, and the rest of the Levites were

in charge of the service, the caring for the tabernacle. And so, the priests were next to it and then the Levites, and then on the outer ring, outside, came all the 12 tribes of Israel. The whole focus of their existence was in regard to the matter of worship. That was the greatest proclamation God made in their midst. I am to be worshipped.

Even the age of the priests, according to Numbers chapter 1 verse 3, a soldier was to be 20 years of age. When a young man reached the age of 20, he could serve as a soldier. In Numbers 8:24 it tells us that a Levite could begin to serve the tabernacle and the temple when he reached the age of 25. But, in Numbers 4 verse 3 it says that a priest had to be at the age of 30. A soldier at 20, a server at 25, a priest at 30. Why? Very simple: because worship was the priority and demanded the highest level of spiritual maturity, because it was the greatest responsibility. Lots of people involved in the activity, a lot of people out there fighting the battle. Another level for those who served, the highest level for those who brought the people to worship God.

I think there's another thing that supports the importance of worship in regard to the Scripture, and that is the offerings. Do you remember back in Leviticus how God laid out early in the book the various offerings the people were to bring to Him? And the first offering of all the offerings was the burnt offering, the burnt offering. In fact, the very altar itself, the brazen altar, became known as the altar of the burnt offering, according to Exodus 30 verse 28. So, it gave it its name. There were all kinds: sin offering, trespass offering, and there were the grain offerings and so forth. But the first offering mentioned is the burnt offering. And what is so wonderful about that is simply this: when a Jew brought his offering to God, in the rest of the offerings, part would go on the altar and part would be eaten. But with the burnt offering, every bit of it was burned up because it was totally to the Lord. The priest didn't share in it, and the sinner or the penitent didn't share in it either. And I think the reason the burnt offering is put first is because the priority activity is always worship, where all is offered to God. That is the essence of worship; it is devoted singly and only to God. And when the temple was built, the permanent temple in Jerusalem was built, that whole aspect of worship was carried right into that facility. And the focus again was to be worship.

Deuteronomy chapter 12 verse 5. What does God say? "Unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put His name there, even unto His habitation shall ye seek and there shalt thou come." Come to the place of worship. That's what He says. Come to the place where God has put His name, and that, of course, is Jerusalem and even more specifically, that holy of holies. And then, verse 6, "And there ye shall bring your burnt offerings." That's first, then the other sacrifices, and tithes, and offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and flocks. And there, you shall eat before the Lord your God, and rejoice and all you put your hand unto you and your households, wherein the Lord your God has blessed you. Come to the temple, He says. Come with all of the fulfillment of all these ceremonial prescriptions, but start it all with the burnt offering.

You remember Isaiah chapter 6 where Isaiah says: “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple,” and so forth? And you remember that he saw above the throne of God the cherubim? The angels? Seraphim. And he saw them there, and it says that they had six wings, “With two they covered their face, with two they covered their feet, with two they did fly.” How interesting that they had four wings related to worship and two related to service.

Worship is the priority. They covered their feet because it was a holy presence. They covered their faces because they couldn’t look upon His holy glory. With just two, they took care of the activities. Worship is the priority. No wonder the Psalmist says in Psalm 95: “O come let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our maker. For He is our God.” And that just triggers your thoughts into Psalm after Psalm after Psalm.

You say, but John, that’s all the Old Testament. Okay, let’s go to the New Testament. Romans chapter 12, and let’s see what Scripture in the New Testament relates to worship as a priority. Romans 12:1 and 2 are very familiar Scripture. Paul has given 11 chapters of the marvelous gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, His redemptive purpose and plan for the world, the mercy He has had on sinful men. And then he says in verse 1 of chapter 12: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, based on these mercies of God, I beg you.” Here’s what I want you to do, based on all of the truth of the first 11 chapters, what is God going to ask? “Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your,” listen to this, “spiritual worship” – *logikn latreian* – spiritual worship. You can write that right in your margin.

Now, listen to me very carefully, 11 chapters of doctrine. Paul has been defining the Christian and all of his benefits. And now he says, in response, what does God want? What is it that God wants from you? This is what He’s done, what does He want? What He wants is spiritual worship. See it there? That is acceptable unto Him. And that word acceptable is a very important word. It is a word of sacrifice. It is a word of worship. Anyone who ever worships any god seeks to bring to him that which is acceptable. It is in the vein of worship. And the word appears again at the end of verse 2, “The acceptable, perfect will of God.” What does God want out of a believer? He wants acceptable, spiritual worship. And it begins with the presentation of the body as a living sacrifice. It begins with a presentation of the, and I think implied in the body is the whole person, a living sacrifice because if it’s, people say, well, that’s just a physical body; it can’t be because giving the physical body is not an act of spiritual worship. The body here is all of us; it is that body containing that true self.

So, because of God’s great mercy to us, God calls on us to present ourselves in an act of worship coming to an altar, putting ourselves there in an act of spiritual worship. Now, let me say it simply: the reason God saved you and me was in order that we might truly acceptably worship Him. That’s the point. Now, let’s go to another passage, 1 Peter 2:5. And you have a similar setting here. In chapter 1, you have the wonders of redemptive grace. You have the great statement in verse 19 of the

precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish, without spot. Verse 18 talks about our redemption. Verse 23 talks about our new birth, being born again. Verse 2 of chapter 2 talks about newborn babes who have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Now, we have been saved, is what he is saying, and as saved individuals verse 5 says, “We have become living stones making a spiritual house.” We have become the living house in which God dwells. God doesn’t live in a house made with hands. God doesn’t live in a building made of bricks and mortar. He lives in the living stones of His people. So, we have become the house of God, a holy priesthood. And what is our call? We as holy priests are to offer up, here it comes, spiritual sacrifices. That is an act of worship acceptable to God. And again, the term acceptable has inherent in it the concept of an offering; spiritual worship, acceptable, true spiritual worship is offered on the basis of God’s transforming work in Christ.

So, you can see, and that’s just a look in a brief way that worship is important. Number one, because Scripture speaks so often of it. Number two, and I’m just going to introduce this second one. The second reason that it’s important to worship is because all of life both now and forever depends on it. Worship is not an addendum to life; worship is at the core of life. You see, the people who worship God acceptably enter into eternal life. The people who do not worship God acceptably enter into eternal death. So, worship then becomes the crux. Worship then becomes the core. Time and eternity are determined by the nature of a person’s worship. How you worship is reflective and determinative in your destiny. Now, there are only two kinds of worship you can offer, really. You can either offer acceptable worship or what? Unacceptable worship. And the mass of the world offers unacceptable worship. God will not accept it. The Bible is explicit on this. And there are people today who want to tell us that ultimately everybody is going to get saved. Ultimately everybody is going to be acceptable to God. That is not true. That is not true. The Bible does not say that. The Bible says there is acceptable worship and there is unacceptable worship.

Now, let’s talk about unacceptable worship. There are four kinds. I’m just going to talk about one this morning, and I’ll give you the rest tonight. First, the first kind of unacceptable worship is the worship of false gods, the worship of false gods. That is unacceptable. People say, well, all those poor people over there worshipping their gods. They’ll be all right in the end because they were sincere. No, they won’t. It is unacceptable to God to worship a non-god because there is no other God, and God is a jealous God. And He will not tolerate the worship of another. He says, “My glory will I not give to another.” And yet, the world worships false gods.

Look at Romans 1 and remind yourself of what we’ve learned in our study of Romans. Verse 21: “When they knew God,” speaking of the human race, “When they knew God they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful.” Now, frankly, that just means they wouldn’t worship Him. They wouldn’t give Him glory. They wouldn’t give Him praise. They wouldn’t give Him thanks. They wouldn’t give Him homage and adoration. They refused to worship God. And God said, “That is unacceptable.” So, in verse 24: “God gave them up to their uncleanness and their vileness and their sinfulness.” It was unacceptable. In fact, what happened? “When they refused to worship God,” it says in verse 23, “they

began to make images like corruptible man and birds, and four footed beasts and creeping things." They turned to idols. Now listen, everybody worships somebody. Everybody worships somewhere. Even an atheist worships. Who does an atheist worship? Himself. He is ultimate. Everybody worships.

And when men reject God, they then, very often, will worship false gods. They'll concoct gods. And of course, this is that which God forbad in the first commandment, that there should be any other gods, but men do that. And basically there are several kinds, two kinds. The first is what you'd call material gods, or earthly gods. They are not specifically thought of as deities; men just worship the material world. I think this is wonderfully illustrated in the book of Job, in verse 24 of chapter 31. And it says this: "If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, 'Thou art mine confidence.'" Now, here's a man who worships gold. He worships money. He worships his material wealth. "If I rejoice because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much, if I beheld the sun when it shined or the moon walking in brightness, and my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth has kissed my hand, this also was an iniquity to be punished by the judge for I should have denied the God who was above." If I worship what I possess, if I worship my little world, if I go around kissing my own hand, I've denied God. But men do that. They worship the gods of their own makings, the gods of the material world.

In Habakkuk, you know, it tells about the wicked Chaldeans and it says, this is interesting, Habakkuk 1:16: "They sacrifice unto their net, and they burn incense unto their drag." What in the world is that? Well, earlier he says they make men like fish of the sea, and they go out with their armies, and they catch men in their net, and they catch them in their drag and pull them in, and they worship their net. In other words, they worship the god of the armed power. They worship the god of power. So, men may make gods out of power. They may make gods out of gold or wealth. They may make themselves god and just go around kissing their hand all the time, paying homage to themselves. Those are the gods of the earth, the material gods. But when men reject the true God, they'll worship another god.

And then, some of them will formulate supernatural gods, deities, supposed deities. And God has said, "This is unacceptable." In Deuteronomy 4:14: "And the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and ordinances," says Moses. "You might do them in the land which you go over to possess." God told me what to tell you. "Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves." He says, now, I want you to be warned about one thing. Listen to this, most interesting. "For you saw no manner of similitude on the day the Lord spoke to you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire." Now, you remember the day that God spoke out of the midst of the fire on the mount Horeb? You saw no similitude. In other words, you saw no form for God. You saw no representation of God. You saw no image of God, none at all. Why? Because God does not ever wish to be reduced to any image, never. And he says when God appeared, He did not appear in any manner of similitude because He didn't want you to perceive Him in that way.

Now, if in your mind you think of God as an old man with a beard sitting in a chair, that's bad. Somebody said, "Idolatry does not begin with a hammer, it begins with the mind." And as you begin to conceive of God in improper terms, you will ultimately cause God to be made in improper terms. And the idolater who takes his hammer and his chisel and forms a god out of wood, forms the god that's in his mind to begin with. When I think of God I do not think of Him in any image; I have no mental image of God. People have asked me that. When you think of God, what is it you visualize? Absolutely nothing. I do not have any mental image of God whatsoever. I have no visual conception of what God is. And I say that by the grace of God, that I should not reduce God to some image.

And so, he says, don't allow yourselves to think of God in those terms. Verse 16, "Lest you corrupt and make a carved image." And that is exactly what they did. Some image out of a male or female likeness, or a beast, or a winged fowl, or a creeping thing, or a fish. And you know all the nations around have had these kind of gods. Did you know that the Philistines had a god that was half-man, half-fish? It was a mermaid in reverse. Very typical. Don't do that, lest you should lift up your eyes unto heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars and the hosts of heaven, you should be driven to worship them. And they did that. They worshipped the sun and the stars and the angels and, he says don't do it.

So, there was no place for that. In the New Testament it says that the things the Gentiles sacrificed, 1 Corinthians 10, they sacrificed unto demons. If you make those kind of gods, you're going to wind up worshipping the demons that impersonate those gods you think exist.

So, there is unacceptable worship to God. And the first kind of unacceptable worship is the worship of false gods. And throughout the Old Testament this is condemned. I just want to draw our thoughts to conclusion by having you turn to Isaiah chapter 2 verse 6. And here is Isaiah's commentary on what was happening among his people. They had forsaken the people, the house of Jacob. They had become, verse 6 of Isaiah 2, "Filled with customs from the east." They had allowed the false philosophies and religions of the east to come in. "And they were involved in soothsaying," like the Philistines, mediums and consulting familiar spirits, and all that, "and they pleased themselves in the children of foreigners." Instead of staying isolated and pure, they had allowed all the foreigners with all their foreign gods to invade their thinking and their worship. "Their land is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end to their treasures. Their land is full of horses, neither is there any end to their chariots." It isn't because they weren't blessed by God; it isn't because they were prosperous. "Their land is also full of idols, and they worshipped the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made. And the common man bows down, and the great man humbles himself, therefore forgive them not." Then, he warns them: you'd better crawl on a rock and hide in the dirt for fear of the Lord and the glory of His majesty.

They were idolatrous. Ezekiel 8 says they worshipped the sun. That's the people of God. The pagans, they worshipped anything they could think of. Gods proliferated everywhere. And it's true today. Every single religion that doesn't rightly discern God worships false gods. And every materialist, every irreligious atheist, agnostic who wouldn't darken the door of any religion, worships some material god of his own invention, even if it is himself. It's unacceptable to God. It damns the soul.

You read in the book of Acts, that marvelous statement by Paul in chapter 17 verse 29. He says, how could you possibly think that God is made of silver, and stone, and wood, when you are from God? You're not silver, stone, and wood are you? How could you think that your originator would be such? Don't you know that like produces like? It seems basic to philosophy. And then, in chapter 19 verse 27 he says, "The whole world worshipped Diana," that ugly gross black cow-looking beast that they worshipped. It supposedly fell from heaven, from whom's paps that hung low, the whole world was supposed to suck its life. And you can read in Revelation chapter 13 about how they will worship the beast and the false prophet, and later on they'll worship the great whore riding on the beast. And later on, they'll worship the false economic system called Babylon. They'll worship their economy, and their money, and their politics, and it will all come crashing down.

So, how you worship affects your eternity. And the first unacceptable kind of worship is the kind of worship of false gods. The second kind of unacceptable worship is the worship of the true God in a wrong way, the worship of the true God in a wrong way. And we're going to see that tonight, and a lot of other things. And I hope you'll be here, because I believe God is speaking to us in a special way in these truths. Let's pray.

Our Father, we know that You are to be worshipped, and You are to be worshipped as a priority of our life. This is not an option. This is not something we can pick and choose. You have called us to worship You. And Lord, we ask Your forgiveness for those so many times when we have come here and not worshipped, or when we have not even come at all, when we have been so indifferent. Those times when we have sought only that which would bless us, feed us, fill us, and not sought that which would glorify You. When we have sought our own joy and not Your glory. When we have sought our own pleasure and not Your majesty. When we have, in our little Christian way, worshipped ourselves rather than You. Help us to know the importance of true, acceptable spiritual worship which You seek, and we pray that as we look ahead to the rest of these messages they might be life-changing for us. And if there are, Lord, here some who have not known Christ and thus have no capacity to worship You at all, those who have been worshipping false gods, or worshipping the right God in the wrong way, or any other unacceptable form, we pray that today they would come to Jesus Christ, and be cleansed and purged, and made true worshippers such as the Father seeks to worship Him. For Christ's sake, amen.

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