

Christian Worship: ...And In Truth

What does it mean to worship in truth?

- Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well that the people of God must worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24) - **Christian worship involves worshipping God in the way He has prescribed**, respecting His role as God by praising Him in the ways He has identified as reflecting His holiness, truthfulness, and love for His people.

Are there biblical examples of worshipping in truth?

- **Jesus Himself** sang hymns with His apostles (Mark 14:26), regularly attended public readings of Scripture (Luke 4:16ff), and often prayed in public gatherings (John 6:11, 12:27-28), **and His commandments to His disciples** included commands about giving to the poor without seeking glory, (Matthew 6:1-4), praying to God as their Father (Matthew 6:5-13), and regularly partaking of the Lord's Supper together (Luke 22:14-20).
- **The book of Acts includes many examples of the early church** participating in all of these practices together (Acts 2:42-47, 4:23-37, 11:27-30, 12:5, 14:21-23, 16:25, etc.)
- There is an indication in Acts that **the gatherings and worship of the church mainly took place on each first day of the week** (Acts 20:7) as a reflection of Christ's resurrection on the first day of the week (Mark 16:2); this is corroborated by other New Testament sources (1 Corinthians 16:1-2, Revelation 1:10).

What does worshipping in truth look like in the church today?

- **Today, the church participates in the same worship practices in which the church of the first century participated**, including the reading and study of Scripture (1 Corinthians 4:14-17), singing praises to God (Colossians 3:16-17), partaking of the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26-29, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26), collective prayer (1 Timothy 2:1-7), and the collection of funds to help those in need (2 Corinthians 9:1-15). In this way, the church of today proves itself to be one and the same with the church of the Bible, worshipping the same God in the same ways and proclaiming the same Gospel of the same Lord Christ.

Key Verses and Ideas:

- **Deuteronomy 12:4 - “You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way.”** ~ This statement is preceded by a list of practices that the surrounding nations would engage in when worshipping their idols (Deut 12:1-3) and is followed by the command to worship God in the place and in the ways He has commanded (Deut 12:5-7). It is made clear that the prescribed methods of worship are not up for interpretation or derivation but are universal to all of God’s people (Deut 12:8-14). These eternal principles of proper worship rely upon the eternal principle of God’s holiness (Ps 145:1-7) and should be applied to the worship of God’s people today as well (Heb 13:7-16).
- **1 Kings 9:6-7 - “But if you turn aside from following me, you or your children, and do not keep my commandments and my statutes that I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land that I have given them, and the house that I have consecrated for my name I will cast out of my sight, and Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples.”** ~ In this warning to King Solomon after the dedication of the temple (1 Kgs 8), the Lord pairs the worship of foreign gods with the abandonment of proper worship, tying the two together and giving them both the same punishment of destruction (Lev 10:1-3). It is evident throughout the Bible that to worship God in a way other than what He has commanded is akin to worshipping someone or something other than God alone, which goes against the central commandments of both covenants (Ex 20:1-3, Mk 12:28-34).
- **Psalms 29:2 - “Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name; worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness.”** ~ Glory is ascribed to God in this Psalm because of the strength of His voice, which shatters the powers of Earth and demonstrates His goodness (Ps 29:1-11). Jesus Himself is shown to be the Word of God overcoming the power of darkness (Jn 1:1-5) and demonstrating His goodness by His dedication to worshipping God alone (Matt 4:8-11). Reliance on one’s own will or opinion rather than God’s voice defeats the purpose of worshipping Him in holiness and is again proven to be a form of idolatry (Prov 3:5-6, 1 Cor 10:14-22).
- **Mark 7:8 - ““You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.”**” ~ Jesus’s condemnation of the Pharisees and their preference of tradition over Scripture is passionate to say the least (Mk 7:1-13). He also uses this occasion to teach His followers about the importance of the words and practices which proceed from a person and their bearing on that person’s righteousness (Mk 7:14-23; cf. Gal 5:22-24). Any tradition that is opposed to what God has said about worship should be avoided, and any worship that is offered without living and worshipping according to His commandments is offered in vain (Is 1:10-20, Col 2:18-19).

- **John 4:22 - “You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.”** ~ Jesus’s purpose in making this statement to the woman at the well is twofold: He is both pointing out the fault in the Samaritans’ incorrect worship of God (Jn 4:19-21) and the fault of all who seek to worship God without the proper balance of spirit and truth, which He has come to reveal (Jn 4:23-26; cf. Jn 1:14-18). Those who identify themselves as the covenant people of God (Gal 6:16) do so in part by worshipping Him according to His Word, thereby demonstrating the transformative power of a relationship with Him (2 Cor 3:7-18).
- **1 Corinthians 14:40 - “But all things should be done decently and in order.”** ~ This final statement of Paul ends a lengthy discussion about the use of spiritual gifts in worship (1 Cor 12-14). Even though these spiritual gifts are not available to us in a miraculous way today (1 Cor 13:8-13), the worship of the church must still include the same measure of spirit and understanding that it always has (1 Cor 14:15) so that God is glorified and the church is built up as one (1 Cor 14:24-26, Heb 10:19-25). The church’s worship has a specific purpose, and it is by worshipping according to the prescription of Scripture that it may accomplish this purpose as God has intended (Lk 19:28-40).
- **1 Timothy 4:13 - “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.”** ~

Perhaps more than any other member of the early church, Paul knew the power and comfort of the Scriptures (Acts 17:1-3, Rom 15:4, 2 Tim 3:16-17). In recognition of this power and comfort, he tells Timothy on multiple occasions to continually read and expound upon the Scriptures at the gatherings of the church (1 Tim 4:11-16, 2 Tim 2:14-19, 4:1-2). Only by holding to the truth of God’s Word may the church receive the guidance it needs to fulfill God’s will, including in the spirit and practice of its worship.

- **Hebrews 12:28-29 - “Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.”** ~ The author of Hebrews contrasts the Old and New Testaments throughout his letter, in this context doing so on the basis of the latter covenant’s greater expression of God’s glory and His unshakeable truth (Heb 12:18-27). The worship of the church is meant to express the glory of God and the unshakeable nature of His truth to all, which also edifies its members and can convict those who are not yet Christians (Matt 5:13-16, Lk 24:51-52). Proper worship is essential to accomplishing this goal, as this is only possible by the power of the Spirit of truth (Jn 16:5-15).

Want to learn more? We would love to study with you!
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