

What's Worship?

Join me in a spiritual experiment. Imagine that you are being transported to heaven as you read John's heavenly vision from Revelation 4:

After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightening, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stopped saying:

*"Holy, holy, holy
is the Lord God Almighty,
who was and is and is to come."*

Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

"You are worthy, our Lord and God,

*to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things, and by your
will they were created
and have their being."*

Let's come back to earth and talk about what we've experienced. It is called worship. Worship is the primary occupation of heaven. It is the highest privilege of Christians and one of the most neglected activities in Christian lives.

What is worship? Worship is acknowledging God's worth. The word "worship" comes from an Anglo-Saxon term "weorthscipe." Because that was so unpronounceable the Anglo-Saxons changed it to become "worth-ship" and eventually it evolved into "worship".

To worship anyone or anything is to recognize and affirm worth. Worship is extremely important to God. In Psalm 29:2 we read, "Ascribe to the Lord

the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness." And Jesus says in Luke 4:8, "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only."

If worship is acknowledging worth

then to worship God is to say that he is worthy of our worship. In Psalm 96:1-6 we read:

Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary.

The psalmist is here listing the worth of God. It includes salvation, his marvelous deeds, the creation of the heavens, splendor, majesty, strength and glory. God's worth is expressed in terms of his attributes (that's who God is) and his actions (that's what God does.)

Have you seen on TV the L'Oreal ad where the

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actress says, “I buy L’Oreal because I’m worth it!” Well, I really don’t know if she’s worth it or not, but I do know that God is worth it! God is worth our worship!

If God is really worth it what are his attributes and what are his actions that show us why we should worship him? God is sovereign. He is holy. He is omnipotent, all-powerful. He is unchanging. He is all-knowing. He’s wise. He’s loving. He’s omnipresent; he is everywhere at once. He is merciful, forgiving, faithful, powerful, pure and righteous. God is consistent; he never changes; God is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is kind, just, patient. He gave his one and only Son—that is the greatest act of all! He’s forgiving. God created the world and keeps it going. He reigns. He heals us. He loves us. He listens. He guides. He teaches. He helps. He answers prayer.

Worship is centering on God rather than self. Now we have a problem here because we are all sinners and sinners are by nature self-centered. Our society accentuates self-centeredness. Most advertising emphasizes self—feelings, appearance, happiness, success. Ninety-five percent of ads are based on selfishness.

We are consumer-oriented, even in religion. We think of God in terms of what he can do for us. We expect from God salvation, healing, happiness and problem solving. And, if God doesn’t produce to our satisfaction we may become angry and quit on him!

This isn’t just the other guy. We all are guilty of this. If we listen to our own prayers and monitor our own thoughts we will see that we are far more centered on ourselves than on God! Read Romans 1:18-25:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the ungodliness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and

exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

Therefore, God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator.

The very essence of sin is worship of creatures rather than the Creator. We are creatures. It is sin to center our worship on ourselves rather than on God.

In Psalm 103:1-5 and 14-22 we read:

Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins, and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

... for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord’s love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children’s children—with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.

The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.

Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. Praise the Lord, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the Lord, O my soul.

The psalmist knew how to worship. He knew that all of life must be interpreted by and centered on God.

We worship in prayer by meditating on God. In your imagination place all the things in your life in a circle—then write “GOD” at the center of the circle. Tell him that he is more important than anyone or anything else in your life.

Worship God through the Bible by looking or him. Instead of primarily looking for instruction or

direction or comfort in reading the Bible, look for God. Keep a journal or write in the margin of your Bible what you discovered about God in his Word.

Worship God in church by expecting him. Go to church expecting to meet God, to see God, to hear God. Don't go primarily for the music or your friends or the sermon. When you go to church expecting God you will find the music more inspiring, your friends more enjoyable and the sermon more interesting.

Worship is shifting the center of our lives away from self to God. We must worship often because we are in constant need of re-centering our lives!

Worship is giving rather than getting. There really isn't much that we can give God. He doesn't need any books or cars or after-shave or flowers. What can we give to the God who owns the universe? We can give him worship!

Worship is hard to do. Most of our praying is to get, not to give. And most often we go to church to get—to receive a blessing or hear good music and a scintillating sermon or make contact with other people socially. We want a good program for our children. All those things are good, but too often we are disappointed with church because we come to get and not to give.

Worship is giving to God. When we worship God in prayer we affirm his greatness, tell him about how good he is and praise him for what he has done.

Worship of God in church is based on giving as well. We pray to give him our adoration and to acknowledge God's greatness. We sing to tell him how good he is, to praise his name and to honor him, not for entertainment. When we give money it's not to support an organization; it's to acknowledge the worth of God. It ought to be our preoccupation on Saturday. We should talk about him on Sunday morning. All week long we should reflect on the worship we have given him. We gather to worship God by giving, not getting!

Matthew, Chapter 2:1-11 is the fascinating tale of the journey of wealthy and wise men:

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he who has been born

king of the Jews, for we have seen his star in the east and have come to worship him? When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him. And assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him in Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet. And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are by no means least among

the rulers of Judah, for from you shall come a ruler who shall govern my people Israel. Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascer-

tained from them what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, Go, search diligently for the child and when you have found him, bring me word that I too may come and worship him. When they heard the king, they went their way and lo, the star which they had seen in the east went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary, his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. And then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts – gold, frankincense and myrrh.

These were great, important men who traveled long distances over an extended period of time all the way to Jesus. They asked for nothing. They gave their gifts. They came to worship, and they knew that worship means giving, not getting.

But worship is far more than something we just talk about. It's something we do. So worship God. Center on him and praise his name!

...all of life must be interpreted by and centered on God.

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