

BEYOND TODAY

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Godly worship – a way of life

Worship goes to the core of what it is to be human, what it is to be made in the image of God.

A place of worship is defined as “a specially designed structure or consecrated space where individuals or a group of people such as a congregation come to perform acts of devotion, veneration or religious study” (Wikipedia).

As a small boy I enjoyed the many occasions when I was taken by bus, often in the rain, to visit grandparents in an area of rows of small, terraced houses near Salford docks. We always approached their house from the back alley which we used to run along to create a distinctive echoey sound. I never really knew exactly where we were on these visits, but I remember that the adults seemed to know the area and described it by the names of churches which stood on many street corners.

In Scripture the “Church” is actually the group of people who make up the congregation, not the building itself. Churches or places of *worship* exist because those who claim to be people of faith want to come together for a public confession of their faith. Traditional church services include praise and thanks to God in the form of hymns and prayers, and teaching through Bible readings and sermons that expound the scriptures, as well as providing an opportunity for those of like mind to meet together.

Support for all these aspects of worship can be found in the scriptures and for most that seems to satisfy their needs. Others may go beyond that and remember to thank God before meals and to pray or study the scriptures at other times.

However is that all that is required of those who claim to follow the God of the Holy Bible?

Worship builds a relationship with God

The Bible asserts that people were specifically created by God in His image (Genesis 1:26) in order to have a relationship with the God who had designed, fashioned and created them. This relationship is based on what is termed “worship.” In speaking the words of the Ten Commandments, recorded in Exodus 20 and repeated in Deuteronomy 5, God states as the first of those commandments: “You shall have no other gods before Me.” To *have* God is to worship the true God and God alone.

Centuries later the apostle Paul, writing to Church members in Rome, comments about people in general,

To worship God is to build a deep relationship with Him, to walk humbly with Him and to reflect more of Him in our lives.

“although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man – and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things” (Romans 1:21-23). Paul is observing that, instead of worshipping God the Creator, people have taken to worshipping *aspects* of the creation.

The need for a relationship with God is often diverted

into the worship of idols in any of their numerous forms. We might add that this kind of idolatry can also include worship of ephemeral items such as wealth, fame, power, prestige or even one's own intellect.

The apostle John, writing in the final book of the Bible, records a vision of a future time when an angel will take the gospel to everyone living on earth, calling on them to fear God, to give Him glory and to worship Him as Creator – the inference being that people living then will not be doing any of those things (Revelation 14:6-7).

How to become a living sacrifice

Worship should be God-centred, not people-centred and should be concerned with what God desires and demands as revealed in the pages of the Bible and not what people desire or demand. Often, the two could not be more different.

To worship God is to build a deep relationship with Him, to walk humbly with Him and to reflect more of Him in our lives. When a lawyer tested Jesus about the most important commandment He responded, “You shall

What Is True Worship?

In most people's minds, worship involves some sort of public service with hymns of praise, prayers and a well-planned liturgy. Such services epitomise for many what is involved in worshipping God. Yet this provides only a partial picture.

A dictionary definition of worship is “reverence tendered to a divine being” and “an act expressing such reverence.” The word “worship” comes from an Old English word meaning “worth-ship” and refers to worthiness, respect and reverence directed toward God.

Do we show our appreciation for God's worth? Certainly forms of outward religious practice with their rituals, ceremonies and prayers can appear to show worship for God. But we must pay careful attention to what He tells us in His Word, the Bible.

God makes it clear that He seeks those who will worship Him “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24). When Satan sought to tempt Jesus Christ to worship him, Jesus sharply rebuked him saying, “You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only shall you serve” (Matthew 4:10). The apostle Paul equated his worship of God with “believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets” (Acts 24:14), referring to what we call the Old Testament.

God wants us to worship Him in truth. We do this by honouring Him, serving Him and giving heed to His instructions. God asks us to live “by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3). Our worship of God is depicted in how we live our daily lives. Christianity is a way of life. It is a way of thinking, acting and living. It affects every aspect of our existence.

What does true worship involve?

True worship of God involves nothing short of the inward transformation of the human heart by faith in

Jesus Christ and His sacrifice, and having Christ live in us through the Holy Spirit to help us obey. External worship practices alone are inadequate. God is looking for those who will worship Him in spirit from a converted and transformed heart. (Be sure to read our free booklets *You Can Have Living Faith* and *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*).

True worship, then, is much more than praise of God in a public worship service. “The worship of God is nowhere defined in Scripture . . . it is not confined to praise; broadly it may be regarded as the direct acknowledgement to God, of His nature, attributes, ways and claims, whether by the outgoing of the heart in praise and thanksgiving or by deed done in such acknowledgement” (*Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, “Worship, Worshipping,” p. 686).

Jesus Christ, quoting from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, sharply rebuked the religious leaders of His day because they misrepresented God's commands and substituted their own humanly devised teachings (Matthew 15:9; Mark 7:7). He said such worship was in vain. Christ reserved the harshest words of warning for those who would profess to worship God (who say “Lord, Lord” (Matthew 7:21), but refuse to do God's will or obey His laws (verses 21-23). Such worship is empty and unacceptable to God and Jesus Christ.

We live in a time when many are disillusioned with traditional worship services. They find them vacuous, without meaning and irrelevant to their lives. It is time to take a fresh look at what true worship is all about.

When we come to understand its real significance, true worship becomes supremely relevant to our lives now and to our ultimate destiny.

*Excerpt from the booklet
Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest*

love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). Jesus did not say to love God occasionally, when we remember or when we need help. “All our heart, soul and mind” means exactly that.

Jesus also said we should be seeking the perfection of God in our lives, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). The apostle Paul referred to this as presenting ourselves as “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1). He continued with the instruction, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (verse 2).

Both Christ’s teachings and Paul’s writings reveal many aspects of becoming a living sacrifice. Perhaps the best summaries are found in Philippians 2:5 – “Let this

mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” – and 2 Corinthians 10:5, where we are told to bring “. . . every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” If we seek to have the mind of Christ in us through God’s Holy Spirit, with God’s help we can worship Him in all aspects of our lives.

When worshipping God, whether in our public, private, or personal worship, we shouldn’t lose sight of the fact that all we do should bring honour to the great God of the universe.

To learn more of the God who created mankind, to have a relationship with Him – to worship Him – please request or download free copies of our booklets *Who is God?* and *Why Were You Born?* Both address the question of the ages – the purpose for the human family’s existence. Also request *The Church Jesus Built*.

David Fenney

Faith not needed to recognise a Creator

The creation speaks for itself.

In modern times scientists have been able to study aspects of the world around us which are not immediately apparent to our unaided human senses.

For example, they have analysed the structure of matter down to sub-atomic levels and the inner complexities of cells such as DNA coding.

However, the apostle Paul, writing in the first century AD, indicates that we do not need to look under the microscope or use ultra-sound scanners to see the Creator’s hand. He wrote, “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20). A lack of faith could be an excuse if faith were needed, but it is not. God has told us they are without excuse – the creation is clearly seen all around us.

Many of us have our favourite creatures that we watch on TV wildlife programmes. Take the honeybee, for example. It sends out scouts looking for a food source. When

they find it, they fly back to the hive doing a little dance to convey information to the other bees indicating direction, distance and location to the other bees. Where did that design feature come from?

Symbiotic relationships, where two unrelated organisms rely on each other, present a challenge to the widely accepted evolutionary worldview. Both the honeybee and the flowers it relies on for food had to come into existence at the same time or neither would have survived. The same applies to male and female creatures or even male and female parts of a plant. Both genders must have come into existence at the same time, fully able to reproduce.

Faith is not needed to know a Creator exists. The evidence is all around us!

To study this topic further, please request or download our booklet *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?*

Michael Hurst



Honey bee pollinates a flower and feeds on its nectar. Shutterstock

Repentance and forgiveness: Both granted by God

Many understand that God can forgive sin. However the process begins with God's calling and another gift, that of repentance.

Jesus explained that no one can begin a relationship with God unless God the Father first calls that individual (John 6:44). Conversely no one can come to the Father except through Jesus Christ (John 14:6).

When we receive this calling, God begins to work with our hearts and minds. The apostle Paul explained to the Ephesians that God would open their minds, giving them the ability to understand that He was God and that He had a plan for those whom He called (Ephesians 1:17-19). God still works this way today.

This calling is a gift. Paul asked the Church in Rome, "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" (Romans 2:4).

Following Peter's visit to the Roman centurion Cornelius, when he baptised this Gentile convert to Christianity, he was asked to report back to the Church in

No one can begin a relationship with God unless God the Father first calls that individual (John 6:44).

Jerusalem and explain to them why he had broken several aspects of the Jewish ceremonial law. Their concerns and his response are recorded in the eleventh chapter of the book of Acts. The conclusion was: "When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, 'Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life'" (Acts 11:18).

A call to repentance

This calling that leads to repentance is also part of God's grace, as Paul explained to the churches in the Roman province of Galatia: "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace . . ." (Galatians 1:15).

John the Baptist came preaching repentance as did Jesus Himself. On the day of Pentecost following Christ's death, resurrection and ascension back to His Father in heaven, Peter spoke of repentance to the large crowd that had gathered. He said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

Here Peter is showing that several things must occur when one repents. True repentance involves the desire to be forgiven sins committed against God. It is not just being sorry for what one has done. That sorrow should become a complete turnaround from breaking God's law to living by it – living it not only in the mind but with the whole being. Repentance is not just a one-off process but something that continues for the rest of one's life (1 John 1:8-10).

Sinful deeds earn the death penalty

Adam and Eve were given a choice as to whether they would obey God or go their own way. They chose the latter, making their own decisions regarding what is right and wrong. Since then, mankind has continued along the same road that Adam and Eve chose.

God calls this disobedience to His instructions "sin." The Bible defines sin as lawlessness (1 John 3:4) or "the transgression of the law" as in the Authorised or King James Version of the Bible. The human heart is prone to this attitude of law-breaking. As the prophet Jeremiah remarked, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

Our deceitful hearts and lawless deeds separate us from God. The prophet Isaiah explained, "Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear" (Isaiah 59:1-2).

To establish a relationship with God requires a complete change of heart and mind.

This process starts with God opening one's mind to understand the word of God. With this comes the realization that the punishment for sin is death, eternal death. Paul warns us that "the wages of sin is death" – that's the bad news. However, he continues to tell us the good news – "but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Since the penalty for sin is death, yet we are to be granted eternal life, then someone must have paid that death penalty for us. When Jesus was crucified, "they put up over His head the accusation written against Him: THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS" (Matthew 27:37). This was the Roman custom to warn those passing by of the penalty for breaking Roman law.

Upon repentance, besides acknowledging the fact that we have sinned and that our sins require the death penalty (meaning that someone has to die), we need to ask God to cover our sins with Christ's shed blood. At this point it is as if our list of crimes – the accusations against us – is taken by Christ and nailed to His cross (Colossians 2:14).



Baptism is comparable to signing a legally binding contract with God.

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Not only did Christ die for us personally, but He also died for every other human being who repents and turns to God: "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2, New International Version). That is the magnitude of the sacrifice that Christ made.

Reconciliation becomes possible

Christ's death also makes it possible for us to be reconciled to God the Father. "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son,

much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Romans 5:10).

Once a person's mind has been opened to this level of understanding then baptism is the next step forward. This is a physical ceremony where a person makes a covenant with God. It is the most important step that anyone will ever make and should never be undertaken lightly. In God's eyes it is a legally binding agreement or covenant.

Once we are baptised, having had our sins figuratively washed away in the baptismal pool and our guilt

Reconciliation can only continue if we remain free of sin.

cleansed by the blood of Christ, we come out of the water a new person to newness of life, reconciled to God with our sins forgiven. To stay that way we need to avoid sin which, unless repented of, will separate us from God again. Through the laying on of hands and a brief prayer, the Holy Spirit is given to help us obey.

For God's part He promises He will continually help us obey and that He will forget our sins. He states, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them" (Hebrews 10:16). Then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more" (verse 17).

For our part we recognise that this reconciliation is only possible because Christ died for us, and therefore we accept Him as our personal Saviour. As we are now reconciled to the Father, we can build a personal relationship with Him, including allowing Him to help us resist the pulls of temptation and sin. Among the many reasons that Christ came to this earth as a human being, one was to reveal the Father to us (Luke 10:22).

Reconciliation can only continue if we remain free of sin. However, even with God's Spirit dwelling in us to help us strive diligently to obey God in all things, this is a tall order for weak human beings. If we do slip up, we need to repent and confess our sins. Then, "He is faithful and just to forgive us" (1 John 1:9).

Why is it important that we develop this relationship with God the Father? He wants to spend eternity with us and is helping us to prepare for that future.

To study further please request or download our study guide *Why Were You Born?*

David Payne

Christ's disciples struggled with their own prejudices

Hardly a day goes by without reports of inappropriate racist remarks being verbalised or published on social media. Comments that attract most attention are often from celebrities or politicians. God expects believers to overcome personal prejudices.

Whilst visiting a Samaritan village, Christ boldly took the initiative in dealing with those subject to the prejudices of others. In John 4, we find Him resting and sitting by a well. A Samaritan woman approached. He did the unthinkable in the light of the common custom of the day. Initiating the contact, He simply stated, "Give Me a drink" (verse 7). Startled, the woman responded, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" (verse 9).

Mutual hatred had gripped the Samaritans and Jews for centuries. It began when the Assyrian Empire deported the northern Ten Tribes of Israel and replaced them with those of mixed race. Added to that it was considered improper for a man to speak to a lone woman. When the disciples returned, they reflected the common prejudices and " marvelled that He talked with a woman" (verse 27).

God shows no partiality

We rarely understand aspects of the gospel all at once. The original disciples certainly didn't. Later in Christ's ministry His disciples "entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him" (Luke 9:52). When the villagers refused to welcome Him, James and John, the zealous sons of Zebedee, were set for action! They asked Christ, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" (verse 54).

Many communities throughout Judea and Galilee rebuffed Jesus, but the disciples didn't ask that they be destroyed. Why Samaria, and not Judea? Simply put, dealing with "others" is not always how we deal with ourselves. It was easier to suggest miraculously eradicating the Samaritans rather than their fellow citizens. Christ responded, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them" (verses 55-56). Yes, even the hated Samaritans.

God later gave John another opportunity to "get it right." Of the first two apostles sent into Samaria to assist in baptising the Samaritans, one was the same John who had wanted to destroy them (Acts 8:14-16). With every

step he took into Samaria that must have weighed heavily on his mind. But when the moment came, "they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit" (verse 17). Such an act for a Jew would have been one of ritual uncleanness, but John had now embraced these Samaritans as fellow disciples.

Ingrained prejudice resurfaces

A powerful drama later played out in Antioch. The apostle Peter had the honour of being the first to baptise Gentile converts (Acts 10). Yet his colleague Paul later wrote of him, "But when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face . . . for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy" (Galatians 2:11-13).

When the Bible states "even Barnabas," it is making a powerful point! Barnabas was "the son of encouragement," Paul's mentor, the one who stood up for people, but he – and Peter – still had human failings to overcome.

Would you ever make disparaging remarks toward someone of another racial or ethnic group, or disassociate yourself from certain friends when pressured to do so?

Christ focused on hearts. Racism, culture wars and ethnic tensions will intensify as we approach the end of this age. Only the prophesied literal intervention of Christ at His second coming will solve man's animosity towards his fellow man. For now, our vital role as followers of Jesus Christ is to mirror His example, taking responsibility for our actions and words within our own sphere of influence, whether family, neighbourhood, school, or work. Christ died for all, let us live for all as we overcome our home-grown prejudices.

Adapted from "This Is the Way . . . Who Is My Neighbour?" by Robin Webber



Q With society today becoming more and more anti-Christian, is it wise to openly preach Jesus as the Christ?

Reader from Cornwall

A Jesus tells us in Matthew 10:33 that “whoever denies Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father who is in heaven.” These are strong words, no doubt, but earlier in the chapter Jesus admonishes us to be “wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16). Elsewhere He tells us that in a spiritual sense we are not to “cast pearls before swine” (Matthew 7:6).

What Christ is saying here is that if people with whom we come into contact aren’t interested in spiritual matters, we should not try to force our beliefs on them. The whole verse reads: “Do not give what is holy to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.”

The apostle Paul reminded his readers that human beings have a natural hostility towards God. He wrote, “the carnal [natural] mind is enmity against God . . .” (Ro-

mans 8:7. In the Old Testament the prophet Isaiah reveals God’s thoughts on this proclivity to reject instructions which emanate from God with the following words, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways” (Isaiah 55:8).

Of course, our thoughts can be in tune with God’s through His Holy Spirit residing in us. It will help change our attitude and guide us in all things (1 Corinthians 2:16).

That said, people around us should know that we believe and follow God, and we should be ready to give an answer to those who ask us of the hope in us (1 Peter 3:15). We should be setting an example of living God’s ways. Jesus told his disciples and followers, “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under the basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house” (Matthew 5:14-15). In verse 16 Christ continued, saying, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

During this age of man, we need to be circumspect with those with whom we come in contact.

Q Why are modern terms for weapons not used in Daniel 11:40?

From the Internet

A Daniel 11:40 reads, “At the time of the end the king of the South shall attack him; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm them, and pass through.” Scholars tell us that the Old Testament book of Daniel was written in the sixth-century BC, or around 2,500 years ago. Daniel was a Jewish youth taken captive to Babylon in the time of Nebuchadnezzar of the Medo-Persian empire.

Neither Daniel, nor his contemporaries, nor translators of the Bible down the ages to our day would have had knowledge of the future technical terms for weaponry (mostly described in English in our time) as they have developed through the centuries. What we have in this verse, and others elsewhere, is a general description in the author’s own words of events and situations to take place far in the future from his own time.

The apostle John had a similar problem trying to describe the events of the Day of the Lord, with its latter-day war machines, in the language of his day. See for example Revelation 9:1-10.

Let the Bible Answer...

What does the Bible say about humility?

God’s attitude towards the humble is found in Psalm 147:6; Proverbs 3:34; Isaiah 57:15 and 66:1-2; Micah 6:8; Matthew 5:3-5; 18:1-5; and in many other scriptures.

Christ’s followers should display the humility He did: Colossians 3:12-13; Philippians 2:5-8.

Some tips to avoid pride and to increase humility are mentioned in Proverbs 27:2; Luke 14:8-11; Romans 12:3; Philippians 2:3; Titus 3:2; 1 Peter 5:5-6.



Letters From Our Readers

Beyond Today television programme

I would like to commend you for the great truths you spread. I am also delighted to now access your *Beyond Today TV* programme online.

Reader from Belfast

Editor's comment: Besides the TV broadcast archived at www.ucg.org/beyond-today/beyond-today-television-program there are also Beyond Today Bible study series archived at www.ucg.org/beyond-today/beyond-today-bible-study, which may be of interest to those with Internet access or with streaming enabled devices (see www.ucg.org/beyond-today/apps).

Literature brings spiritual benefits

This is the best magazine I have come across. It has brought me closer to our Creator and His only begotten Son, our Redeemer Jesus Christ.

Reader from Northolt

I would like to say "Thank you" so much for this wonderful source of information which has made the Bible so relevant. What an incredible book it is!

Reader from Dorset

Please renew my free subscription. Over the years the magazine has been a great source of inspiration to me without which I would be a much poorer soul.

Reader from Doncaster

Help in challenging times

I really look forward to receiving

your magazine and booklets. They continue to give me strength, insight and peace in this chaotic and evil world.

Reader from Coventry

Thank you for the *Beyond Today* magazine. It is so relevant to the challenging times in which we live. Also for the Bible Study course and booklets you provide. Please accept this donation of gratitude and to support your work.

Student from Swindon

With appreciation and a thankful heart, I don't know how I would cope in this evil world without the Bible and all the reading materials you send me. Thank you so much.

Reader from Uxbridge

Background to Middle East "troubles"

Is there a booklet or DVD available that would help me to understand the history of all the "troubles" that still exist in the Middle East?

Reader from Tamworth

Editor's comment: Background information can be found in our booklet The Middle East in Bible Prophecy. This topic was also covered in the May/June 2016 Beyond Today magazine (www.ucg.org/beyond-today/beyond-today-magazine/why-does-the-middle-east-matter) and in the Beyond Today television programme Mideast Family Feud (www.ucg.org/beyond-today/beyond-today-television-program/mideast-family-feud).

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