

## [IN GOD'S IMAGE 74 – THE CHURCH - WORSHIP ]

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***Our focus has shifted to the role and function of the church.***

- ◆ We are looking at the role of the church through five virtues, faith, hope and love, worship and service.
- ◆ The church as the body of Christ needs to be people of faith, people of hope, people of love, people of worship, and people of service.

***Last time we looked at the subject of love, this time our focus is on the subject of worship.***

- ◆ ***The first question we need to ask is, "Why worship God?"***
- ◆ It seems about the only thing that is worshiped these days is "money."
- ◆ It seems everyone is willing to bow down to the god of avarice.
- ◆ Even movies tell us, "Greed is good!"
- ◆ Running a close second to greed is celebrity worship. We have reality show stars, rock stars, movie stars and American Idol stars.
- ◆ Much of the change we have experienced in our western societies over the last couple of centuries is the shift that has occurred with the introduction of the enlightenment and secular humanism.
- ◆ Although there have been many positive aspects associated with these developments, there has been one major negative and that is, as the term humanism implies, the emphasis has shifted from worship of God to worship of humans.
- ◆ This is not a new development in human history as the apostle Paul spoke about this trend in Romans 1.
- ◆ ***Romans 1:25 They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.***
- ◆ Instead of humanity striving to grow into the image of God, we now strive to make God in our image.
- ◆ God of course warned against this trend by making this His first and second, "Thou shalt not's!" (Exodus 20:3-6).
- ◆ In this session we are going to look at the first of three questions regarding worship and that is, "Why should we worship God?"

***So why should we worship God?***

- ◆ The first thing we need to acknowledge is, God is vastly different from us, hence the use of the word "transcendent" in relation to God.
- ◆ As Jesus told the Samaritan woman, God is spirit, meaning He is outside the four dimensional restrictions of time and space and transcends both dimensions (John 4:24).
- ◆ So while God is infinite and transcendent, humans are finite and inferior.
- ◆ Not only is He vastly superior to us and worthy of worship, but also it is He alone who can also handle the adulation. associated with worship unlike the human celebrities we just mentioned (gossip magazines existence depend on celebrities' failings).
- ◆ In contrast, God is deserving of worship because of the following reasons.
- ◆ ***Revelation 4:11 "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."***
- ◆ In our earlier session on "faith" we talked about three comprehensive claims God has on human beings. He is our Creator or Maker, He is our Father, and now after Jesus Christ's saving work on the cross, He is our Savior.
- ◆ These three titles reveal why God is worthy of praise and worship.
- ◆ Before time and space existed, God decided to share his existence with others and so began this amazing process of creating human beings with the potential of sharing in the life and love of God Himself.
- ◆ The gift of life from God should not be underestimated, as science to its consternation is unable to create the life that exists in the smallest seed.
- ◆ The title of "Creator" or "Maker" denotes ownership, and as God is the one who has given us life, He deserves the glory, honour and power this verse implies.
- ◆ The title "Father" follows on from the title Creator in that He is not only the one who bought us into existence, but it goes further in that this title implies relationship.
- ◆ This relationship is not to be confused with all of the self-interest complications of fallible human relationships.
- ◆ Humanity was created to be drawn into the divine relationship that is the Trinity.

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- ◆ And as we saw with the last two sessions on love, this divine relationship is characterised by the self-sacrificing love exhibited by Jesus Christ and the all-conquering love the father demonstrated in welcoming back the prodigal son.
- ◆ It is through this display of divine love that our status of slaves to sin cut off from God has been transformed to now being welcomed back as His forgiven adopted children.
- ◆ ***Galatians 4:4-7 But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. <sup>6</sup> Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." <sup>7</sup> So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.***
- ◆ This verse confirms this relationship status we now enjoy with the Father.
- ◆ But it also confirms the relationship status we enjoy with that other comprehensive claim God has on us as our "Savior."
- ◆ God sent His Son to redeem us from the curse of sin.
- ◆ In Revelation 7:14-15 one of the heavenly elders explains to the writer of Revelation that the vast multitude in white robes worshiping God is made up of persons who, "***...have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.***"
- ◆ For this reason they join with the heavenly host before the throne of God, and worship him day and night.
- ◆ So we see our worship then is rooted in our creaturely existence, in our relationship as sons of the Father and with our redemption through Jesus Christ.
- ◆ These are all wonderful spiritual blessings poured out on us, all of which have originated from our transcendent God.

### ***But our worship of God needs to go deeper than just being thankful for what God has done for us.***

- ◆ As in any developing relationship one has to spend time with the other party to find out who they really are.
- ◆ There is no substitute for spending time in God's "presence" (There's that word again).
- ◆ It's simply not possible to worship an unknown person, let alone an unknown God.
- ◆ Our relationship with God may begin with gratitude and thanksgiving, remembering all that God has done for us.
- ◆ But while gratitude is a fine quality, as our relationship with God grows deeper, we need to move past thanking God for all He has done for us to thanking Him for who He is.
- ◆ It is at this point that our focus shifts from thanksgiving for what God has done for us to true adoration where the focus is rightly on the makeup and character of the One who has provided these blessings.
- ◆ God wants to be regarded as more than a useful convenience to have around to forgive us, to hand out blessings, fight our battles, and heal our diseases.
- ◆ This unfortunately is the mistaken concept of the "prosperity" gospel whose focus is on what God can provide for us like some kind of cosmic ATM machine, rather than on who He is.
- ◆ That is like getting married to have someone around to do the housework, the shopping, cook the meals, etc.
- ◆ Just like a wife who wants more than to be considered as a useful convenience to have around or to be a trophy wife, God desires more from the relationship.
- ◆ The primary reason for getting married is for the sake of love, love for another, for intimate communion with another, and for sharing the joys and sorrows of life together.
- ◆ So when it comes to our worship of God, it should be for the sake of love, a response to the holy love of God demonstrated to us through Jesus Christ.
- ◆ God wants us to love Him for who He is, not only for what He can do for us.

### ***An emphasis on "Who God is" rather than "What He can do for us" also dramatically changes our whole approach to our personal worship.***

- ◆ Rather than thinking, "I had better say my prayers and study my Bible this morning, otherwise God won't bless my day," instead He wants us to spend time with Him because we enjoy His presence and want to deepen our relationship with Him.
- ◆ The nation of Israel came in for severe criticism because they made this same mistake of thinking their sacrifices would somehow manipulate God into blessing them.

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- ◆ **Amos 5 :21-22** *"I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me. <sup>22</sup> Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them."*
- ◆ God does not want to be the subject of manipulation. He wants a relationship with us. He wants us to love Him for who He is, not what we think He can do for us.
- ◆ **Amos 5:4** *This is what the LORD says to Israel: "Seek me and live;"*
- ◆ This too is what God wants from His bride, the church.
- ◆ When we seek God for who He is rather than what He can do for us, our whole focus in regard to worship changes.
- ◆ We begin to regard our prayer and Bible study as an opportunity to have quality personal time with our gracious heavenly Father, our Abba, so as to get to know Him better (presence).
- ◆ It's the same with going to church. Rather than being a chore, "Well I had better go, otherwise I won't be blessed," we regard it as an opportunity to come together as God's community to worship our gracious heavenly Father.
- ◆ And of course we can extrapolate this principle to apply to our other spiritual worship opportunities (a word I prefer rather than "disciplines") giving of our time and resources in service to this dying world.
- ◆ The emphasis of our Christianity shifts from being one of "duty" to one of "love" and that is when religion turns into Christianity.

### ***The grace of God is another example of how our focus can mistakenly fall on ourselves rather than our graceful God.***

- ◆ Usually when we think of the term grace it is in relation to what it means to us, undeserved favour or pardon.
- ◆ Although this is an important aspect of grace, we should not neglect the merciful and graceful nature of the God who bestows this undeserved blessing on us.
- ◆ Grace in some ways is very much like the act of breathing.
- ◆ We inhale the generous grace God has showered on us and in response we exhale and give back to the grace-giver our generous worship and adoration.
- ◆ This is why Holy Communion plays such an important role in our worship as it reminds us where our focus should be.
- ◆ The focus of the bread and wine point us to the gracious God who sacrificed His body and blood for us.
- ◆ This emphasis is reflected in Jesus' words, "Do this in remembrance of me." (1 Corinthians 11:24-25).
- ◆ By all means thank God for His grace to us, but don't forget to worship and adore the merciful God who extends that grace to us.
- ◆ Jesus came to reveal the true nature of the Father to us, so the more we live out our Christianity, the more we should come to appreciate why we should worship Him.