

Worship is a Gift from God

Passages: Gen 3:20–24

Hebrews 10:1–7

The worship of a Supreme Being is a common feature throughout all human societies and cultures. No matter where you go in this world, people are worshippers. From our early childhood, all of us have experienced the strange power and release of worship in one form or another. So fundamental is the experience of worship that it transcends our rational processes. That's why illiterate people can worship! That's why autistic children and the mentally handicapped can worship. One writer has even claimed that worship is the most fundamental instinct of the human being—more powerful than the sexual instinct!

In other words, worship is at the heart of all that it means to be human!

It's no wonder why scientists have spent so much and money on trying to understand worship and why it is such a universal urge in human beings! Some scientists have concluded that...

1. Worship is cultural activity– It originated as an expression of culture, designed to unify a particular social group.
2. Worship is Psychological: Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx advanced the idea that worship comes out of deep inner need to make sense of our world.
3. Worship is Biological: Recently, some scientists have been trying to tell us that worship is part of our genetic make-up! It's is hard-wired in us!
4. Worship is Metaphysical: Philosophers will often explain worship in terms of the human desire to connect with something bigger than ourselves.

Now, the main problem with all these scientific explanations is that they all start with the human being, **as if worship originated in us!** It assumes that worship was our idea, stimulated from something within ourselves.

That's why, today, I want to suggest a fifth idea for why human beings instinctively worship God. I believe that we worship simply because worship is a Gift from God!

To demonstrate what I'm saying, let's go back to the Biblical story of Adam and Eve. As you know, when Adam and Eve were first created, they had an unbroken relationship with God. In that perfect relationship with God there was perfect worship of God. They knew Him and they honoured Him! (To worship simply means to acknowledge the worth of someone.)

But, of course, gradually Adam and Eve turned their back on God's worth—they did this by deliberately choosing to put greater worth in what the serpent was telling them than on what God had said. As a result, they stopped worshipping God—they stopped seeing the worth of God!

But, tell me: **Did their action of turning away stop God from coming near to them?** Never! Indeed, today's passage from Genesis 3 tells us that, not only did God come near to them outside the Garden, but verse 21 says that God sacrificed an animal on their behalf in order to bring them back to Himself. Indeed, this was the very first sacrifice in the Bible! And through that sacrifice, God was opening the way for the original relationship with humankind to be restored. And the beautiful thing is that Adam and Eve accepted it-- they allowed God to clothe them and take away their shame!

Now tell me-- If you were Adam and Eve, what would have been your response to God's gracious action? Would you have thanked Him? Of course! That is what worship is! As they received God's sacrifice, Adam and Eve's hearts were changed towards God and they responded to His mercy and love through worship!

This is my point: **Worship is always a response to what God has already done for us!** Indeed, evidence suggests that Adam and Eve were so touched by the sacrifice that God made for them that they responded by making animal sacrifices for God! I say that because, when we come to Genesis 4, we see Cain and Abel bringing sacrifices to God! Why? Because this is what their parents did! Not only did **God's sacrifice** encourage Adam and Eve to

respond with a **sacrifice**, but they, in turn, taught this sacrificial response to their children—and so it was passed down from one generation to the next!

In one sense, it did become a cultural ritual. But it was never meant to be a mindless ritual—sacrificing an animal to God was always meant to come from a heart of gratitude and thanksgiving!

Think about **Genesis 9** and the story of Noah and his family when they came off the Ark. For months, they'd been on that Ark! They'd witnessed God's faithfulness through the storms, the wind and the rain. So, what do you think is the first thing they do in response to God's sacrificial care over those many months? They offer sacrifices in response to God's love and mercy! It was a heart-felt response!

In fact, this is exactly the pattern you see throughout the entire Bible! Human beings, prompted by God's great sacrificial love and mercy, repeatedly worship God with sacrifices. As I said, **worship always starts as a gift from God which inspires us to bring gifts to God.** In fact, the entire sacrificial system was built on this idea! Why did people bring sacrifices of the best of their herds and flocks? Was it because they were afraid of God? Was it because they wanted to appease an angry deity? Never! **They came with the best sacrifices because they were grateful for the sacrifices that God had made for them!** God who was constantly patient, loving, kind, generous and merciful towards the people of Israel was regularly sacrificing Himself for them! And so, they came with sacrifices.

But, here's the best part of the whole sacrificial system: After the priest had slaughtered the peoples' animals and burnt up the fat on the altar, guess what happened? The people then got the pleasure of sitting around with the priests to eat the rest of the meat! Their worship turned into a feast...a celebration of the goodness of God! While God was there, taking in the pleasing aroma of the sacrifices, they were joining with Him in a feast! **Worship is gift from God!**

Now, in all this talk about sacrifices, I need to make a comment about **world religions**. Every religion on earth has a system of animal sacrifices. Why? Simply because we are all descendents of

Adam and Eve! The idea of making animal sacrifices has been passed down from generation to generation, connecting every culture back to that first sacrifice made by God to clothe Adam and Eve!

But, the greatest tragedy of the human race is that, although every culture and every religion still makes animal sacrifices, most have lost the original meaning behind this ritual. I saw this firsthand in West Africa—instead of making sacrifices in **response** to God’s love and grace, sacrifices were made to get God’s favour and blessing, as if a sacrifice had the power to twist God’s arm! Indeed, most of the elaborate systems of animal sacrifice found in the world today are based on the idea of getting something from God. Of course, this is a huge deviation from God’s original plan. Through fallen minds, the human race has distorted the true meaning of worship as a response to God’s great worth, exchanging it for techniques designed to manipulate God! (In some cultures, people have even sacrificed their own children thinking it would please God and gain His favour!) The Apostle Paul expresses his horror at such a notion of worship when he writes in Romans 1; **“²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.”**

Sadly, the idea of true worship also degenerated in Israel! The priests began to teach the people that their sacrifices would get God’s favour! As a result, they no longer worshipped God with **grateful hearts**—they worshipped with **selfish hearts**...which isn’t worship at all! They brought their sacrifices (any old sacrifice would do!) as a way manipulating God...buying His favour.

That’s when God started to say things like: **“Stop bringing me meaningless sacrifices!... I hate your New Moon festivals and appointed feasts. They have become a burden to Me.”** (Isaiah 1:13–14) In last book of the Old Testament, the Book of Malachi, God rips into the priests, saying, **“A son honours his father and a servant his master. But where is the honour due to me?”** ... **When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be**

pleased with you? Would he accept you?”, says the Lord Almighty...“Oh that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you”, says the Lord Almighty and I will accept no offering from your hands.” (Mal 1:6,8,10)

Clearly, the relationship that once inspired true worship was now gone! Once the vision of **God’s sacrifice for us** is lost, true worship is also lost!

Now friends, can you see why Jesus so desperately needed to come? Jesus came to call men and women back into a relationship with the Living God... **a relationship of worship!** And how did He do it? There are **two things** that took place in His life, death and resurrection:

First, Jesus showed us what it means to be a true worshipper of God! Throughout His life, Jesus fully appreciated the Father’s gracious love. He continually lived in that love, and He continually engaged in worship saying things like **“I praise you Father...”** and **“I only do the things my Father tells me to do!”** It was only then, as a worshipper, that Jesus was able to give His own life in sacrifice to God. According to Hebrews 10:5–7, Jesus was able to say to God: **“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll — I have come to do your will, O God.’”**

But Jesus was not only the true worshipper who offered His human life in sacrifice to God. He was also the divine sacrifice from heaven offered by God to cover our sins and take away our shame! In the Book of Romans, the Apostle Paul declares that **“While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”** While we were operating just like Adam and Eve, turning our backs on God and giving more worth...more worship... to the devil, Jesus offered Himself as our sacrifice; He was the Lamb of God slain to take away the sin of the world! In a direct reflection on the first sacrifice made by God to clothe Adam and Eve, Paul says that we are now “clothed in Christ”— In the death of Jesus, God has covered our shame and brought us back into relationship with Him.

Paul speaks of this in Romans 8-- “**He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him freely for us, how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?**” (Rom 8: 32)

The point is that Jesus not only shows us **how we should worship** (how to come to God with sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving) but He also shows us **why we should worship!** His sacrifice on the cross is our inspiration and our motivation to worship the God of incredible love, grace and forgiveness!

And so, let me conclude with three quick thoughts:

First, although the worship of a Supreme Being is a common feature of all human cultures, **it is never true worship** until it is offered purely as a **response** to the grand story of God’s love! It is only when human beings recognise that **God alone has made the greatest sacrifice for us** ...only then can we truly respond in worship! This, of course, is where the cross of Christ fits in! True worship begins with the recognition that **Jesus is the Lamb of God** who takes away the sin of the world. In Jesus, God has made the supreme sacrifice on our behalf! And it is this sacrifice which now **clothes us** (as God first clothed Adam and Eve). As Paul said, “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ!” Clothe yourselves with the garment of His righteousness! It is His sacrifice alone that takes away our shame! And that is the sole reason why we worship! **“Behold the lamb of God!”**

Second, are you a worshipper? Do you come with a grateful heart in thanksgiving for all that God has done in Jesus, His Son? Do you come to bow down and offer yourself as a living sacrifice in response to the selfless love of God for you? **“We love because He first loved us!”**

Third, do you realise that the majority of the world still comes to God with the false hopes of manipulating Him and gaining His favour? All around the world, people are still making their sacrifices in vain...all because they do not know the great love of God and His great sacrifice over us in Jesus Christ. And so, there is a great responsibility on our shoulders to tell the world about God’s love and His generosity towards us the sacrifice of His own

Son on our behalf. If true worship only comes as a response to the sacrifice of God over us, then our calling is to share this message of Christ with the world. Indeed, it is our great joy and privilege to help the world become true worshippers by pointing them to Jesus!

All this is because **Worship is a gift from God!**

Let's pray.