

God Cares How We Worship

Text: John 4.24

Theme: Our holy God cares greatly how we worship Him

Introduction — Teaching Church History to small group of homeschool teens

- covered time from Christ's ascension to our modern day today
- perhaps my personal favorite period is from beginning of Reformation thru Puritan era
- so much happened, so much changed as God brought His church back to Him in truth

What do you think the Reformation was all about?

- some would say: all about recovering the authority of the Bible
- and this would not be wrong
- church & popes had put that in shadow of their own man-created traditions
- great reformers recovered Sola Scripture: the Bible alone is our source of authority

Others might say all about recovering justification by faith

- we are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone
- and you'd be right on that account
- Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, and Soli Christus
- our best efforts, our good deeds do not make us righteous in God's eyes

- the Reformation recovered this grand truth of Scripture
- and you'd not be wrong on that account

But how many would be surprised to see that worship is at heart of reformation

- John Calvin, wonderful Swiss reformer, said: worship at the heart of the reformation
- he taught that Bible is a means to a greater end: to a knowledge of God
- with that knowledge restored, we then worship our Heavenly Father
- worship is the goal
- even the lofty height of justification by faith alone is a means to an end
- that we might be in right fellowship with God in order to worship Him rightly
- it is the Scriptures that we discover that our holy God cares greatly how we worship Him

This is the main goal of the church...

I. CREATING WORSHIPERS

- John Piper wrote thirty years ago now:

Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is

ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.

- *The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad!*
(Psalm 97:1 ESV)
- *Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!
Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for you judge the peoples with equity
and guide the nations upon earth.*
(Psalm 67:3–4 ESV)

1. Created for worship

- the Reformation recaptured this truth: worship is what we were created for
- then, the Westminster divines put it into a simple statement in their catechism:
- What is the chief end of man?
- The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.
- so, even our efforts at proclaiming the gospel to all the world is fueled by this one desire
- Scripture declares: *Let the nations be glad and sing for joy...*
(Psalm 67:4 ESV)

- but those redeemed from every tribe and language and nation and people...
- we see this in heaven in Revelation 5.9, don't we
- they must be made into worshipers who can say from the heart:
- *May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the Lord.
I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.*

(Psalms 104:34; 9:2 ESV)

2. A sad indictment

- if we miss this truth, we're created to worship God, then missions will be weak
- even the unbelieving world sees this
- Charles Misner, a scientific specialist in general relativity theory, wrote this about A. Einstein
- Einstein, no believer, still saw what so many churches & Christians miss

The design of the universe...is very magnificent and shouldn't be taken for granted. In fact, I believe that is why Einstein had so little use for organized religion, although he strikes me as a basically very religious man. He must have looked at what the preacher said about God and felt that they were blaspheming. He

had seen much more majesty than they had every imagined, and they were just not talking about the real thing. My guess is that he simply felt that religions he'd run across did not have proper respect...for the author of the universe.

- in other words, what Einstein saw among church worship was a charge that we simply didn't
- this great truth, from Scripture and from the Reformation must be recovered
- and I believe that we, the people known as Albion Evangelical Free Church, must also
- recover it and hold it dearly

In other words, we need to know...

II. THE GREAT “WHO” OF OUR WORSHIP

- *To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One.*

Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these?

*He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name;
by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power, not one is missing.*

(Isaiah 40:25–26 ESV)

- we saw, as we examined Revelation 4 & 5 that we must see God as He is

- and then, when we see Him as He is, we will worship Him as He is
- we will cry out, with the Psalmist: *Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth!*

(Psalm 57:5 ESV)

1. Worship this glorious God

- but we also saw, last Sunday, that God lets us know we can't just worship in any old way
- indeed, the prophet Isaiah declared the word of the Lord
- *'For my name's sake I defer my anger;
for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off.
Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver;
I have tried you in the furnace of affliction.
For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned?
My glory I will not give to another.*

(Isaiah 48:9–11 ESV)

2. Just a small sampling from God Himself

- God chose us for His glory
- *even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for*

adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

(Ephesians 1:4–6 ESV)

- indeed, God created us for His glory
- *I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”*

(Isaiah 43:6–7 ESV)

- He rescued this chosen people for His glory
- *Our fathers, when they were in Egypt, did not consider your wondrous works; they did not remember the abundance of your steadfast love, but rebelled by the sea, at the Red Sea.*

Yet he saved them for his name’s sake, that he might make known his mighty power.

(Psalm 106:7–8 ESV)

- Almighty God defeated Pharaoh to show His power and the glory of His name
- *For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.”*

(Romans 9:17 ESV)

- at times, when His people would sin and rebel against Him, God would work for His glory:
- *“Do not be afraid; you have done all this evil. Yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart. For the Lord will not forsake his people, for his great name’s sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself.”*

(1 Samuel 12:20, 22 ESV)

- when we walked through Daniel, we saw the Exile as a result of God’s people’s great sin
- but even then, He would restore a remnant for His glory’s sake
- *“Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.”*

(Ezekiel 36:22–23 ESV)

- so, even if we profane God’s name through “unauthorized” worship, He will work
- our chief example, Jesus, God’s only begotten Son, sought God’s glory in all He did

- *The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood.*

(John 7:18 ESV)

- you recall that Jesus told us to do our good deeds so God gets all the glory
- *In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*

(Matthew 5:16 ESV)

- we are warned that not seeking God's glory makes faith impossible
- *How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?*

(John 5:44 ESV)

- all Jesus' suffering was for His Father's glory's sake
- *"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour"? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."*

(John 12:27–28 ESV)

- when we come to God with nothing but sin in our hands, He forgives for His glory
- *"I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins."*

(Isaiah 43:25 ESV)

- indeed, the Psalmist indicates that is the only reason we cry out for forgiveness
- *For your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great.*
(Psalm 25:11 ESV)
- therefore, we are to do everything, after that point of rescue, for God's glory
- *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*
(1 Corinthians 10:31 ESV)
- we are to serve in such a way that God gets the glory, not any one of us
- *whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*
(1 Peter 4:11 ESV)
- any spiritual fruit we receive, any spiritual gift we exercise, is for this same grand purpose
- *And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*
(Philippians 1:9, 11 ESV)
- those who dishonor God's glory through unbelief come under His judgment

- *Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.*

(Romans 1:22–23 ESV)

- *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*

(Romans 3:23 ESV)

- Jesus is coming again...for the glory of God

- *They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.*

(2 Thessalonians 1:9–10 ESV)

- God's ultimate plan is to fill the whole earth with His glory
- *For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*

(Habakkuk 2:14 ESV)

- everything that happens—everything—we redound to God's glory
- *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*

(Romans 11:36 ESV)

- as we will see as we continue walking through Revelation,
God's glory is over all things

- *And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.*

(Revelation 21:23 ESV)

3. In light of God's glory, let us worship God

- but let us worship how He commands us
- let us search the Scriptures to see what He does command for His worship
- let us prohibit that which He prohibits, so as not to profane His name
- pray that Einstein's indictment does not fall upon us here at Albion

Let's consider some...

III. PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE US

- even as this list of passages regarding God's glory was not exhaustive...
- neither will this list of principles be exhaustive
- but I pray it will give us a place to start

1. How are we to worship?

- this question usually ends with answers about style, not substance
- is your worship traditional or contemporary?
- it's really nonsense: all our worship is contemporary...we're doing it now!
- but where is it anchored, that is the better question
- all our talk about styles, lyrics, what we like, what we don't, what suits our tastes in music

- it's all about us; it's not about God at all
- seldom are our conversations about worship regarding what God likes, what God wants from us in our worship
- when was the last time you asked: What does God like about worship?
- What does God want in worship? Should be the very first question
- remember, we're not worshipping worship; nor worshipping one another and our tastes!
- we are worship God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth
- we lift up the name of Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son
- we come to do this through the Holy Spirit of God
- so, let us worship God

2. What regulates our worship of God then?

- the word "regulates" bothers some people, but only because they put themselves at the center
- God is at the center, as we have seen
- and His Word is our guide, not our feelings, sentiments, or experiences
- so what guides us, regulates our worship, in order to make sure it pleases God?

- the most obvious answer is what God has given us: His precious Word, the Bible
- so as we search this book, what specific activities can and should a church do when it gathers
- and this is something the leaders of the church must decide, each and every Sunday
- the pastor and the elders have been charged with this great and holy task

3. God, by His Word, governs what each local church should do when it gathers

- these principles should then regulate our worship
- God has not left us up to our own desires to worship Him
- here is how we could state this regulating principle:
- Nothing should be used in the Church which has not either the express Word of God to support it, or otherwise is a thing indifferent in itself
- “things indifferent” are simply matters of what time do we meet, how do we sit when here, and so forth
- when do we sit or when are we to stand
- but when it comes to all other matters, we must ask: Does this glorify God? Not us, but God

4. Elements of worship

- there are certain things we are definitely told to do when we gather to worship
- we are to read the Word, pray the Word, preach the Word, sing the Word, and see the Word
- I hope you picked up on how central the Word is to be in all of our worship
- in asking if our worship is pleasing to God, we should also always ask: did we use the Word?

5. Forms of worship

- this pertains to the manner in which we go about carrying out the elements of our worship
- should we read corporately or responsively?
- should we sing in a major key or a minor key?
- should we have only extemporaneous prayers or can they be scripted, written out?
- should we use banners or not?
- here is where we need wisdom, wisdom that comes from discerning leadership in the church
- certain forms may be more or less wise
- while Scripture may not give us all the details here, it will always guide us

6. Circumstances surrounding worship

- these are simply the practical aspects of how we organize a worship gathering
- when are where do we meet
- should we use air conditioning or not?
- what about bulletins and orders of worship?
- hymnals alone or lyrics projected upon the wall?
- all these circumstantial matters should come under the authority of Scripture
- and then we use biblically-infused wisdom and prudence in all other matters

Conclusion – Does any of this matter?

- yes, because God's glory and name and fame is at stake before the world
- yes, because, above all things we were created for His glory
- yes, because Jesus died on the cross, forgives our sins, gives us eternal life for God's glory
- and yes, because these matters guard and protect our liberty as Christians
- there was once a church that simply decided it could worship in any old way they chose
- and Corinth was rebuked by God for it
- let us not be like that early church

- instead, let us worship God