**Foundations (49 of 60) Worship in the Church - RC Sproul**

What does it mean to worship God and what's the proper format for worship? That's our topic on renewing your mind Welcome to renewing your mind with the founder and chairman of Ligonier Ministries. Dr. RC Sproul You know churches around the world have felt the tension of worship wars Half a congregation wants contemporary music the other half wants to sing hymns Someone prefers a pipe organ while others like an orchestra, but often these preferences miss the point Today, dr. Sproul examines the true meaning of worship He'll point us to the Old Testament where we find dynamic principles on how to adore God This message comes from the 60 part series foundations an overview of systematic theology Here's dr.

RC Sproul when we look in the New Testament at the book of Revelation in chapter 5 we get a glimpse into the inner sanctum of heaven itself and We hear there the song of the living creatures the elders and the angelic host and they are saying this Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing and Every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such are as in the sea And all that are in them I heard saying blessing and honor and glory and power Be to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever then the four living creatures said amen and The 24 elders fell down and worshipped him who lives forever and ever I Can't hear this text read or read it myself really without having Chills go up and down my spine because it's almost as if while we read this text or hear it read We're eavesdropping on something extraordinary That every Christian should be able to relate to at the very depths of their soul because what is going on here in? this text plain and simply is pure unvarnished unadulterated worship And when I say that no Christian can really eavesdrop on this kind of heavenly experience without feeling some stirring within their soul I say that because I'm convinced that as creatures made in the image of God we were made to worship our Creator This was one of the great purposes for which we were created in the first place And it is the purpose from which we depart in our fallenness and our sinful human nature But once the Spirit of God changes the heart and the soul of a human being Regenerates them quickens them to spiritual life They now have a capacity for worship that they've never had before and not just a capacity but I think all of us deep within ourselves have a hunger and a yearning to be able to find a place to find a way to express this posture of Worship and many time we talk about the nature of the church. We would be completely negligent if we Overlooked one of these central purposes if not the very most important Function of the people of God as they are gathered together corporately in common Solemn assembly is that the purpose for that experience is To express ourselves in worship I know that when people are asked by a public opinion polls why they go to church the number one reason why people go to church Is for fellowship or to get something out of it to be Educated or edified, but we all know that the main reason we're there and supposed to be there is for worship Well, I'm going to spend a little bit of time today Asking the question really what is worship? Well in the first instance the whole idea of worship is as the word itself suggests to assign worth or value to God and You notice how the song here of the heavenly host in the book of Revelation begins Worthy is the lamb who was slain they are attributing worth to the person of Christ and what he is accomplished and that Attributing of worth we call in the English language honor Now conversely when we go to Romans 1 and we recall that Paul Speaks of the revelation of God's wrath against the whole of the fallen race of human people that the chief reason why The whole world is exposed to the wrath of God is that because even though God has manifested himself Clearly including his eternal power and deity to all creatures that man in his fallen state Refuses to do what? refuses to honor God as God In a word what we refuse to do in our fallen state is to worship God because we withhold from him the honor that properly belongs to him and In that particular text of Romans 1 Paul goes on to say that what we do instead of honoring God is God is that we exchange the glory of God For a lie and serve and worship the creature rather than the Creator We love to receive honors ourselves in this world and we love to be at celebrations where some human being who's achieved greatness in sports or in Warfare or in some other prodigious achievement and so the whole process of honoring is something we're familiar with Except when it comes To giving the honor where in the final analysis honor is Due and that is to God who is the being of supreme value and of supreme worth and who? supremely deserves and merits the honor of his creatures Now what does it mean to honor him in worship? We use other words to describe this experience. We use words like exaltation or Praise we hear a lot about praise music and the giving of praise and that has its roots again in the biblical History particularly in the Old Testament where worship was seen as the offering of sacrifices But the offering of sacrifices that we're most familiar with in our study of the Old Testament are those sacrifices that are offered as a sin offering Symbolizing the atonement and so on but even before the offering of animal sacrifices as transgression offerings was instituted by God there was from the very beginning the offering of sacrifices to God simply to honor him to bestow glory and Exaltation upon him to return something to him that we regard as valuable We give to him as a gift.

That's how we honor people We try to give them a blessing or some kind of valuable gift to say Thank you to them for what they have achieved or what they have done for us Now we also tend to think that since the Old Testament is over and the sacrificial system That pointed to Christ's perfect atonement has been fulfilled once and for all that the age of sacrifice is finished Well, the age of sin offerings is over because Christ has fulfilled that demand for us once and for all and yet Paul again Tells us in Romans 12 that we ought not to be conformed to this world But we ought to be transformed how by the renewing of our mind, etc And that we may do what that we may present our bodies as living Sacrifices to God which is our reasonable service is one translation or another translation, which is our spiritual worship and so the sacrifice is still to be given and it is the sacrifice of the offering to God of praise and That offering is to be given with the substance of our entire lives That's what it means to worship God is to bring to him the praise and glory That is worthy of his name another word that we find in Scripture. That's closely connected to The concept of praise and worship is the idea of adoration I'm afraid that in many ways we've cheapened this term for how we have used it in maudlin categories with Romance in America, we used to have a song that was called the alphabet song that began a you're adorable Be you're so beautiful See, you're a cutie full of charms and so on and we talk about people as being adorable Meaning by that they're cute or they're attractive. They're pretty or whatever But as I say that cheapens the concept of adoration adoration How do we define adoration adoration is an intense feeling of affection Again in the romantic realm if somebody is madly or passionately in love with somebody else They may say that they adore that person, but properly speaking adoration is more than that I mean, it's one thing for me to love my wife.

It's another thing to worship her I'm not to worship her that kind of love that kind of affection that is associated with the concept of adoration Is to be given to God and to God alone, and though I think we all have some sense of what it means to be in a posture of adoration the precise definition of it is Next to impossible to give it's almost an ineffable thing Because adoration as we understand it Biblically is something that takes place in the innermost recesses of our souls That is of a spiritual nature that defies quantifying and defies precise Definition and yet I think we all know it when we experience it We all know what it's like to be in church or even in our own prayer closet be reading the scriptures and be overcome with an internal sense of ecstasy as it were where maybe we groan in inaudible or Inexpressible terms because we are so profoundly moved and we feel this sensation It's not in our gut it's not in our feet. It's not in our ears It's just somehow deep within our souls or what I would call the human Spirit where there is a spiritual connection between the non-physical aspect of our humanity with the very Character of God where we're not only praising him with our lips or with our thoughts But we have this holy sense Coming from deep within our own spirits that flows over into affection admiration Reverence ah Before the Living God and that is what I think is what we're doing when we're engaged in adoration It's almost akin to what people who live in a monarchy Experience when they're awestruck by the entrance of a king and they do Obeisance to the king by bowing down before him by putting oneself in a lowly position So that the person who is being reverenced in such a situation is thereby Exalted but again, that's a poor analogy because that's respect and admiration and veneration Given to human beings which isn't worthy to be compared in the final analysis to that Veneration which is to be offered to God and to God alone, you know, one of the most difficult texts I think in the New Testament to interpret is that text in John's gospel when Jesus is having his conversation with the woman of Sychar the woman at the well Where the woman asks a question about where is the proper place for the worship of God? She was a Samaritan and Samaritans worshiped God at Mount Jerusalem where the Jews concentrated their worship at the central sanctuary In Jerusalem, and so the woman says in chapter 4 of John verse 19, sir I perceive that you're a prophet our fathers worshipped on this mountain and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place Where we ought to worship and Jesus said to her woman believe me The hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem worship the Father You worship what you do not know, but we know what we worship for salvation is of the Jews But the hour is coming and now is when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth For the Father is seeking such to worship him God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth well, Jesus says two things about Proper worship the kind of worship that God wants from his people and he says that that worship Which is to be pleasing to God is worship. That is given in spirit and In truth, I said this is an extremely difficult text.

I think to understand and to interpret I think it's fairly easy To understand half of it the half where Jesus said that we are to worship in truth Because truth is distinguished obviously in the scriptures from falsehood this precludes all forms of idolatrous worship false worship is Substituting something for God that is not the true God or another kind of false worship is Hypocritical worship or feigned worship, which is insincere and not genuine But I think that's more what's in view with the second aspect that Jesus says when he says twice here That God wants people to worship him in spirit and in truth again. What does that mean in spirit? When the Bible speaks of the spirit and it speaks of the spirit basically in two distinct ways Obviously the most frequent reference to spirit in the Bible is that reference which is made frequently to God the Holy Spirit But the Bible also speaks about the spirit of a man that is within the man Namely the human spirit and we give very little attention to that. It seems in our day In fact, we've almost abandoned really believing that there is such a thing as a human spirit or a soul That is integral to our makeup as human beings.

I think what Jesus is talking about here is soulful worship Worship that as I was speaking of earlier flows Out of what the Bible sometimes calls the heart and there is not referring to the organ that pumps blood through our system But refers to the central depth dimension of our Personalities and I think that's what Jesus is getting at here He says what God wants are people who come in and who will worship him from that deep core of being that is part of who we are That no one else can see that no one else can ever measure Because it is unique to every human person. In fact, it's the very essence of what we call Personality now, I don't think any of us can deny this non-physical aspect of what it means to be a person because without it we wouldn't even be persons we'd just be soulless brutish creatures or just another animal but we have this capacity for Spiritual connection between ourselves and the God who is the Spirit now in the few moments I have left I want to say two things. First of all that at the time of the Reformation everybody remembers that the central to the whole debate was the doctrine of justification and certainly that was Luther's preoccupation and Calvin for example agreed with Luther at every point of his doctrine of justification, but Calvin's all-embracing consuming passion for Reformation in the 16th century was with respect to worship Because Calvin saw the greatest enemy to the health of the people of God Was the proclivity that we have in our natural constituent nature toward idolatry and he saw that idolatry would creep into the life of the church in thousands of different ways and So Calvin was possessed with the concept of offering pure worship to God if there's anything that's been lost in Protestant churches today, I'm afraid it is that fundamental concern for the propriety of worship I mean we tend to be more interested in our own entertainment than we are in expressing the purity of Worship that is offered in spirit and in truth.

And the final thing I want to say is this even though Old Testament worship had elements associated with it that were tied to the prefiguring of the atoning work of Christ that was to come namely the sacrifices that were offered as part of the sacrificial system of Israel Nevertheless, this is the only place in biblical history Namely the Old Testament where we have patterns of worship Virtually dictated by God Himself If we examine the patterns of worship that we find in the Old Testament We find patterns of worship that God Himself directed and authorized and I think by examining those things We can learn basic principles of what is pleasing to him And the one thing that stands out to me when we examine Old Testament worship Is that in the worshiping community of Israel according to God's design for worship the whole person? Was engaged in the act of worship It was certainly not mindless The mind was very much involved and people in certain Protestant traditions like my own the Presbyterian tradition You know put a great emphasis upon the mind and the reason and learning and all the rest in Worship and if sometimes the Presbyterians have their way all they would do would be have preaching on Sunday morning Because certainly that's an important element of it, but there's more to worship than the mind all five senses of Which we are made were engaged in Old Testament worship There was the eye as the design of the tabernacle and later the temple Was filled with things that were beautiful that God Himself had designed saying for beauty and for holiness Down to the garments that the priest wore were aesthetically pleasing Everything about the environment for worship Excited the eye for a sense of the transcendent beauty of God Himself and the ear Was involved in the worship service because of the central place in the Old Testament that we find for music That's why the book of Psalms was written in the first place They're basically hymns that were used in worship for the people of God But not only the ear and the eye but the nose as they had the incense and all the rest Because for the Jewish people they had a certain aroma that was pleasing that became associated with the presence of God and This was a delightful sensory experience to them as part of worship. Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying we should be swinging around Incense in our churches today I'm just saying that in the Old Testament the olfactory sense was integral to the person's response and Of course in addition to sight and sound and smell there was also the taste of The sacramental meals of the Passover meal that then has transferred over to the Lord's Supper in the New Testament and you would hear the language of the Bible taste and see that the Lord is good and Finally there was the tactile dimension the laying on of hands by which the minister or the priest would actually touch the person Indicating the touch of God's blessing or benediction when the minister in the church today Raises his hands and pronounces the benediction He is doing a kind of communication shorthand where in the early church the minister would go around and lay his hands physically on each Member and pronouncing a blessing of God on them Touching them for the sake of God But when congregations got too big that became a symbol where the hands were outstretched to symbolically touching everyone and now we Reserve the touch to shaking the minister's hand at the end of the service But the point is that if we look at the Old Testament we can find exciting dynamic principles That may be blended together To teach us to offer the proper kind of honor and adoration and praise that God requires Helping us understand worship that pleases God That's the founder and chairman of Ligonier ministries.

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