

October 7, 2001 by Steve Brandon



The Worship of the Church

John 4:21-24

- 1. The Place of worship is not important (verse 21)**
- 2. The Object of worship is all important (verse 22)**
- 3. The Parameters of worship are spirit and truth (verses 23-24)**

The activities of any church are often broken down into three categories. The first category relates to our activity toward God. The second category relates to our activity toward each other in the church. The third category relates to those outside the church (i.e. non-believers)

I have heard these categories described in various ways.

Worship; Service; Evangelism.
God; Ourselves; Others.
The Lord; The Body; The World.
Exalting the Savior; Equipping the Saints; Evangelizing the Lost

My personal preference is to call them, "Upreach, Inreach, and Outreach," simply because it describes the direction of our efforts: up towards God, inward towards one-another, and outward towards the world. Every activity of the church involves one (or more) of these activities. For instance, ...

- your personal Bible reading and meditation upon the Lord is an activity of upreach.
- your phone call to a fellow member of the church is an activity of inreach.
- your inviting your neighbor over for dinner is an activity of outreach.

Over the next few weeks, we are going to be looking at each of these activities (upreach, inreach, and outreach). We begin tonight, by looking at the first of these activities: our upreach, which focuses upon our worship. Thus, I have entitled my message tonight, "The Worship of the Church."

This is a most exciting topic to discuss, because of its importance. Worship has been called, "the highest moral act a human can perform" (John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, p. 76).

To guide our thoughts this evening, I invite you to open in your Bibles to John, chapter 4. This passage contains for us some of the most pointed discussion in all of the Bible concerning worship.

The chapter begins with Jesus on a north-bound journey from Judea in the south to Galilee in the north. In between these two locations was the region of Samaria. It says in verse six that Jesus was wearied from his journey and took rest by Jacob's well, where he encountered a woman from Samaria. Jesus took the opportunity to witness to her concerning Himself. He spoke of Himself at the living water, which quenches thirst forever.

When Jesus finally revealed to her that he knew that he knew of her five failed marriages and her current live-in boyfriend, she said in verse 19, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet." At this point, it is difficult to tell exactly what the woman meant by this statement. Either the woman really believed ...

- ... that Jesus was a genuine prophet, and thus, able to discern things with the power of God,
- or
- ... that Jesus merely picked up this knowledge from the streets of Samaria.

At any rate, she changes the subject and asks Jesus the most difficult and controversial theological question around the region of Samaria. Perhaps she was properly motivated by knowing that one stands before her who could answer all of her questions. Perhaps she was attempting to stump Jesus, because nobody else made this issue clear before and she is doubtful that anybody else will.

In verse 20, she asked, "Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." This question was difficult and controversial because the Samaritans, had long held that Jerusalem wasn't the center of worship, but rather, that Mount Gerazim was. The Samaritans traced their understanding of this matter back to 931 B.C., when the nation of Israel was split in two (1 Kings 12). Jeroboam, king of the north, built an altar in Shechem, at the base of Mount Gerazim, lest those in the north go down to Jerusalem in the south and the "heart of the people ... return [to Jehovah]" (1 Kings 12:27). Eventually, those in Samaria had

established their own priesthood, which was different than the Levitical priesthood.

Even to this day, there are Samaritan priests, who trace their lineage back to the time when sacrifices were ordered in Shechem. In some ways, they have legitimacy, because they continue to sacrifice according to the Law of Moses. If you go to Mount Gerazim on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), there are Samaritan priests, who are offering blood sacrifices, while the Jews have ceased their sacrifices.

The question proposed by this Samaritan woman addressed the issue of legitimacy. If Jerusalem is the proper place of worship, then the Samaritans are wrong. If Shechem is the proper place of worship (i.e. this mountain), then the Jews are wrong. Jesus responds to her question by speaking about the essence of true worship. Jesus first tells us that ...

1. The Place of worship is not important (verse 21)

In verse 21, Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father."

By giving this answer, Jesus refuses to enter into the debate of the Samaritan woman concerning the location of worship, but reflects upon what would happen in a few short years. Jesus speaks of a coming hour when the location of worship would not be of importance. Of course, we understand "the coming hour" to refer to His death. For at the death of Christ, great changes in the worship of God took place.

It used to be that the people of God would need to draw near the temple of God to worship God. In the Old Covenant, God was distant to worshippers. Moses went up mount Sinai, but the people stood far off. According to the Law, people would bring animals as sacrifices to a priest, who would sacrifice the animals before the Lord on their behalf, because the people couldn't offer their own sacrifices. Though God's presence dwelt in Jerusalem, yet His presence was still far off. It was only accessible to one of the priests (who served as High Priest that year) one time per year -- at Yom Kippur.

But, remember what happened when Jesus died upon the cross. The veil to the holy of holies was "torn in two from top to bottom" (Matthew 27:51). Jesus "entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:12). Last week, we saw from Hebrews 10:1-4 that there is no need for sacrifices any longer, because Jesus has become the one perfect sacrifice. It is through Jesus alone that sinners are ever made righteous and holy before God.

We need to realize, however, that Jesus' death upon the cross did far more than simply dealing with our sin problem. It radically changed our approach to God. No longer do we need to worship God through a priest, for "there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). Today, we are instructed to "draw near with confidence to the throne of grace" (Hebrews 4:16). No longer do we need to worship God before the holy of holies in Jerusalem, for Jesus said, "Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).

So, when you think about "worship," what comes to mind? What do you think of?

- Do you think about singing on Sunday morning?
(As if that only is worship).
- Do you think about singing on Sunday evening?

But God is with us all the time and we can (and ought) to worship Him at all times in all places. May I encourage you to think of worship like Romans 12:1 puts it? "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship" (Romans 12:1).

Paul urges us to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice. Sacrifices are normally killed and consumed with fire upon the altar (animals or grain sacrifices). This cannot mean that we are to kill ourselves for God, since it says that we are a living sacrifice. I believe that Paul is speaking here of our whole lives given completely and sacrificially to the Lord. Elsewhere Paul writes that we are to present the member of our body "as instruments of righteousness to God" (Romans 6:13). He says that we are to "present [our] members as slaves to righteousness" (Romans 6:19). This is complete and wholehearted dedication in worship to the Lord.

Notice how this verse ends, "which is your spiritual service of worship." In other words, our whole lives are lives of worship. If you think that worship only happens during the music time of our Sunday gatherings, you are quite unbalanced. Think about it, we join together for a corporate worship service for what, 90 minutes per week? That is about 1% of our time each week. Our gathering and corporate worship is unique, but when you consider how little time we have to worship corporately together, its importance is minimized a bit.

I believe that of far more importance is your own, personal worship of the Lord, which extends far beyond your daily Bible reading and prayer: "to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice." May I submit to you that your every act ought to be an act of worship, which is simply what it means to love God with all of your heart.

Think about your day.....

- When you awake in the morning, you are to worship the Lord.
- When you take your morning shower, you are to worship the Lord.
- When you eat your breakfast, you are to eat while you are worshipping the Lord (every spoonful of cereal).
- When you drive to work in the morning, you are to be worshipping.
- When you are teaching your children, it is a act of worship.
- When you do your laundry, it is worship.

When you mow the lawn, you are to worship the Lord.

When you clean the kitchen after dinner, your cleaning is to be worshipful before the Lord.

Family worship ought to be simple, because you are simply calling your family to do what has been done all day (but more formally).

Tucking your children to bed is worship.

Going to bed is worship.

Everything is to be worship, because our bodies are "to be presented ... a living and holy sacrifice" (Romans 12:1). I don't want to trivialize this. But I want you all to think this way, because this is how the Bible speaks! You remember the perpetual practices in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks;" This again is the picture as it relates to worship.

We are always to be offering our worship before the Lord. Always rejoicing ... always praying ... always giving thanks ... always worshipping!

I can only mention a few ways to cultivate this in your lives. Verse 2 (in Romans 12) speaks about how we are not to be "conformed to this world, but transformed." This is how we live worshipful lives ...

- by living a transformed life that isn't conformed to this world.
- by not letting sin reign in your bodies.
- by putting off sin.
- by presenting our bodies as instruments of righteousness before God (Rom. 6:13).

How can I do this?

"By the renewing of your minds" (12:2).

By thinking upon the things above (Col. 3:2).

By seeking first His kingdom and righteousness (Matt. 6:33).

By acknowledging Him in all your ways (Prov. 3:6).

With the crucifixion of our Lord on the cross, the hour has come, when the location of worship isn't important.

We fall into the same error when we believe that we worship only when we come to church. But our **worship never ends!** Our worship isn't restricted to location or gatherings. Sure, it is heightened at these times, as we intently focus our hearts on Him, but it is only a small proportion of our worship. In other words, worship is far more than merely a Sunday morning activity.

John Piper's observations are pertinent at this point. He says, "We find in the New Testament, perhaps to our amazement, ... an utterly stunning degree of indifference to worship as an outward ritual, and an utterly radical intensification of worship as an inward experience of the heart. ... in the epistles of the New Testament there is very little instruction that deals explicitly with corporate worship - what we call worship services. Not that there were no corporate gatherings for worship: 1 Corinthians 14:23 speaks of 'the whole church gathering together,' and Acts 2:46 speaks of the early church 'attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes,' and Hebrews 10:25 speaks of 'not neglecting to meet together.' But this is not much and the remarkable thing is that, even when the gatherings are in view, the apostles do not speak explicitly of 'worship.' ... So you can see what is happening in the New Testament. Worship is being significantly de-institutionalized, de-localized, de-ritualized. **The whole thrust** is being taken off of ceremony and seasons and places and forms; and **is being shifted to what is happening in the heart** - not just on Sunday, but every day and all the time in all of life." (from a sermon preached on 11/9/1997).

Let me ask you a few probing questions that will help you to evaluate your worship this evening.

1. Do you think of yourself as a living sacrifice, continually being offered to the LORD?
2. Do you seek, in your heart to worship God always, not just during Sunday worship services?
3. Are Sunday worship services a mere reflection of your life, but perhaps heightened with the presence of other believers?

Let us now turn our attention to verse 22. We notice that ...

2. The Object of worship is all important (verse 22)

In verse 22 we read, "You worship that which you do not know; we worship that which we know, for salvation is from the Jews."

Recently I was speaking with a Hindu gentleman. The focus of our conversation turned to discuss spiritual things. I asked him about his gods that he worshiped. He said that in Hinduism there were many gods, but that he specifically worshiped two of them. He couldn't remember their names, only that he had seen a few pictures of them. He said that one of them looked a little bit like an elephant. I asked him what these gods of his did. He replied that he didn't know. I then asked him whether or not these gods were real. He said (and I quote him exactly), "Yes, I think so."

At this point, I proceeded to tell him of the One True God who made heaven and earth, to Whom our allegiance is owed. I told him of Jesus Christ, who died to pay the penalty for sins and of the urgent need to believe in Him alone. He said, "Oh yes, I know about Jesus. I was raised in a Catholic school." This gentleman worships that which he does not know. Such worship is obviously false worship.

Notice that the Samaritans weren't in quite the same situation as my Hindu friend. My Hindu friend is quite deceived pertaining to whether there is one true God or not. Look at verse 22 again: "You worship that which you do not know."

The Samaritans believed in the Pentateuch, (the first five books of the Old Testament). So, they had many correct beliefs concerning God and who He was and that He demanded sacrifice for sin. However, Jesus still tells the Samaritan woman that there was something defective concerning the worship of her countrymen. What is defective? They worshiped that which they did not know.

Lest you think that this is a far off and remote point today, simply think about the religious discussion surrounding the bombing of the Trade Centers a few weeks ago. There have been an abundance of ecumenical prayer meetings. Some of you have been in discussion with others concerning the character of God and the essence of salvation. There has been much discussion that "we all worship the same God," whether it be Allah or the Jewish God or the Christian God or the "God is love" God.

This was nowhere illustrated better than on Larry King Live last Saturday night (Aired September 29, 2001 - 21:00 ET). Here are a few quotes...

Rabbi Kushner (best selling author) - I have got problems with hell. I have trouble believing in a God who would send people to eternal damnation. ... I rather think God is beyond that. I think they're not in heaven, I think heaven is reserved for people who have lived a good life. I think they have simply disappeared. They had dreams of an afterlife, they had dreams of pleasure and praise and being welcomed and all that, and I don't think they are anywhere. They are nonexistent, and that's the best thing that can happen to them. ...

Deepak Chopra (CEO and founder of the Chopra Center for Well-Being): God is infinity creativity, infinite love, infinite compassion. In fact, those are the qualities attribute to him in the holy Koran and in Islam also. ... God is love, God is the source of all that was, all that is, all that will be. Let's not give God a brand name. ...

Kushner: I hope that you and your viewers have noticed the amount of agreement and overlap between your Jewish and your Muslim panelists. For me, that's the most encouraging thing I have heard in the last 18 days.

You have Jewish and Muslim people agreeing with each other. You have spiritualists throwing in their opinions into the mix. It is all quite confusing because the true God isn't know.

Now, many of these people are quite zealous for their version of "God," however, all of the zeal in the world won't make up for ignorant worship. Paul said of the Jews, "I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Romans 10:2-4).

Anybody who doesn't know Jesus Christ is a false worshiper! We need to worship God in knowledge. Good intentions are not good enough. "Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father" (1 John 2:22,23). God, as He has revealed Himself in the person of Jesus Christ, is to be worshiped. All other worship is unacceptable.

Let's look further into the words of Jesus.

3. The Parameters of worship are spirit and truth (verses 23-24)

In verses 23,24, we read, "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

Notice the phrase that is repeated. "True worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth" (John 4:23). "Those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24).

Worship in spirit

This is not referring to the Holy Spirit, but rather to the spiritual realm, like verse 24, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." This is somewhat what Jesus addressed in verse 21, when he spoke about the place of worship. Worship must transcend the physical realm.

Our worship must be a spiritual experience. Our thoughts and emotions must bring us to "greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8). That is worship. It must be experienced! The Puritans used to speak of "experimental" religion. They simply meant that true religion transcends mere intellectual thought. True religion (and worship) must engage the heart of a man.

In verse 21, we learned that the location of worship is not important. But other physical things are not important either, if your worship is primarily a spiritual, rather than a physical experience. If we find ourselves soon in a rented facility that isn't a church building, this will become quite apparent to us.

Having a cross in your building is not important.
Having a pulpit is not important.
Having pews is not important.
Having computer projection equipment is not important.
Having pianos is not important.
Having clarinets is not important.
Having hymnals is not important (Right?)

Now, having said that, let me say that each of these things, though not important in themselves, can be important as they can lift our worship into the spiritual realm. We are physical beings. We cannot escape that. As a result, much of our worship will involve physical things. But, any physical thing that we use in our worship, must be seen as a means to approach God, who (as verse 24 says) is spirit.

In fact, I believe that this is why much of corporate worship is focussed on music. Music can take us to height of praise that mere thinking or speaking cannot. John Piper said it well, "The realities of God and Christ, creation and salvation, heaven and hell are so great that when they are known truly and felt duly, they demand more than discussion and analysis and description; they demand poetry and song and music. Singing is the Christian's way of saying: God is so great that thinking will not suffice, there must be deep feeling; and talking will not suffice, there must be singing" (from a sermon preached on 12/28/1997).

Even Beethoven recognized the effect of singing voices. In seeking to establish a joyous mood for the last movement of his Ninth Symphony, he introduced voices, which were normally not present in symphonies, simply because Beethoven realized that instruments alone just wouldn't be enough to fulfill his vision of celebration.

Worship in truth

This isn't too difficult to understand. It simply means that we need to worship God according to how He has revealed Himself. We need to worship God according to the truth of the Scripture. We saw in verse 22 that the Samaritans didn't do this. They worshiped in ignorance. They worshiped a god they did not know.

But this phrase, "in truth," goes further than the Samaritan error. The Samaritans erred in that God was not the object of their worship. This phrase, "in truth," describes not only the object of our worship, but also the content of our worship. The truth is simply what we know about God, in agreement with Scripture ...

- ... how He is the awesome and holy creator.
- ... how His works have been manifest in His creation.
- ... how He redeemed Israel from Egypt
- ... how He chose to redeem us from sin and despair through Jesus Christ
- ... how His judgment upon the unbelieving world is coming.

Spirit and truth must both be present

If we are to truly worship God, we need to have both spirit and truth. If we have spirit, but not truth, we are mere enthusiastic fanatics. If we have truth, but not spirit, we are lifeless corpses.

In our worship, we need to engage both our heart and our mind. We need to have feeling and thinking. We need to have emotions as well as rational thought.

Again, let me remind you that all of these things must be present in our lives, not merely in our singing on Sundays. Furthermore, they must be present in the entirety of our worship services. When we sing, we need to sing in spirit and truth. When we pray, we need to pray in spirit and truth. When we hear the word taught, we need to receive it in spirit and truth.

All that we do must attempt to focus our hearts on God. If something we do brings attention to ourselves, we aren't worshiping God, but taking His glory from Him. In other words, God is both the **subject and object** of our worship.

Spirit and truth must be balanced

Some of you, when you hear these words of Jesus read, you hear this, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in **spirit** and truth." Others of you, when you hear these words of Jesus read, you hear this, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and **truth**."

As you know, while we are meeting on Sunday evenings, my family has been visiting various churches in town. This imbalance has really hit home in recent Sundays. One Sunday, we visited a church that was filled with "Spirit" worship. I appreciate the hearts of the people worshipping. They were into their worship and genuinely seeking God. However, there were things said and sung that simply weren't true. Heartfelt? Yes. True? No.

On a different Sunday, we visited a church that was very truth oriented. We could object to nothing that was said. However, we didn't sense a great heartfelt experience from the people. The singing was lifeless and dull. The leader of music simply said, "Let's turn to hymn #27" and they sang hymns. I noticed that several were looking around when the songs were sung. They sang hymns because they sing hymns in their worship services. There seemed to be little direction given in their singing to direct their hearts to the Lord. Truthful? Yes. Heartfelt? No.

This morning, there was a gentleman in front of us, who was greatly stirred by the music to worship. He was dancing and moving around in front of us. However, he practically slept through the sermon. He loved the spirit, but had difficulties being as excited about the truth being proclaimed.

God wants spirit and truth to be balanced. Obviously, God is not pleased with worship that is filled with error. But on the other hand, God is not pleased with worship that is cold and lifeless. Nor is God pleased with worship that has much spirit with very little truth. Neither is God pleased with worship that has much truth, but very little spirit.

In the Bible we see various examples of problems with either extreme.

Jesus had this against the church in Ephesus. This church had correct doctrine and truth, as they sniffed out the false teachers in their midst. However, they had little spirit. Jesus said that "they left their first love" (Rev. 2:4).

Similarly, God could not endure iniquity and the solemn assembly for the sinful worshipers Judah. He said, "I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts ... So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you" (Isaiah 1:14,15). They had little spirit (in that they were sinful), but much truth (they worshiped according to the ordinance of God).

On the other side, when Moses came and found the Israelites worshiping the golden calf (Exodus 32), they had much spirit in their worship, but little truth. They worshiped the golden calf as if the golden calf was Jehovah, who had brought them out of the bondage of Egypt. The Samaritans were also guilty of worshiping in spirit, without the truth of God.

In all of these examples, God was not pleased with their worship because of their imbalance of spirit and truth. These are the parameters which Jesus has given to us to be true worshipers. I believe that they can be used as a litmus test. If an individual or a congregation passes the test of having balanced spirit and truth worship, I believe that God is pleased with their worship.

We need to be balanced. I know that it is difficult to measure these things. Because they are different. It is like a recipe for an apple pie calling for the same amount of apples and filling. One comes in chunks, while the other is liquid. But if you tasted that pie, you would have some sense if the balance was off. Either it would be lots of apples and little filling or it would be lots of filling and little apples or it would be just perfect! However, we need to do our best to reach a balance.

Spirit and truth must be maximized

When we say that we must be balanced in our worship with spirit and truth, it doesn't mean that we must sacrifice spirit for the sake of truth (or truth for the sake of spirit). If we are not balanced, the solution isn't to decrease the amount of truth in our worship so that the spirit of our worship will rise. Nor is the solution to decrease our spirit's involvement so that our worship can be filled with truth. The solution is to increase the level of our truth and spirit in worship to fullest extent possible.

When Jesus was asked, "What is the greatest commandment," He responded by saying, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:37). In other words, Jesus said that our love for the Lord must reign supreme in our lives. In our worship, this ought to manifest itself in our spirits being wholly engaged in our worship, both private as well as corporate.

Similarly, when the truth of our worship is always kept simple or "light," we fail to worship God in His fulness. We see the richness of the truth concerning God saturate the Psalms as we constantly see them magnifying and exalting the Lord for all of the wonderful things that He has done. They marvel at God's creation (Psalm 8) or God's deliverance (Psalm 9), or God's word (Psalm 19), or God's tender care (Psalm 23), or God's majestic holiness (Psalm 24), or God's power (Psalm 29), or God's forgiveness (Psalm 32), ... The Psalmists were constantly focussing on all aspects of the truth concerning God and His works.

Likewise our worship ought to be saturated with truth about God. This is a particular danger for us today as we see the trend across our land in churches moving toward "light" and "simple" choruses. Many churches could do better by increasing the truth content of the songs they sing.

Spirit must follow truth

I have yet to define what worship is. I have done this on purpose, because I wanted us to focus on both of these aspects of worship individually first. A good definition of worship will simply to regard the proper relationship of spirit and truth. Worship is "spiritual response to truth."

John MacArthur states simply when he says that worship is "all that we are, reacting rightly to all that He is" (The Ultimate Priority, p. 147). Donald Whitney reiterates the same thought when he wrote, "The more we focus on God, the more we understand and appreciate how worthy He is. As we understand and appreciate this, we can" help but respond to Him. Just as an indescribable sunset or a breathtaking mountaintop vista evokes a spontaneous response, so we cannot encounter the worthiness of God without the response of worship. ... And to the degree we truly comprehend what God is like, we will respond to Him in worship. That's why both the public and private worship of God should be based upon and include so much of the Bible. The Bible reveals God to us that we may worship Him. Bible reading and preaching are central in public worship because they are the clearest, most direct, most extensive presentation of God in the meeting. For the same reasons, Bible intake and meditation are the heart of private worship. Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs are sung either to express truth about God or in worshipful response to God. Prayer is a response to God as He is revealed in Scripture, and so is giving" (Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life, pp. 81,82).

We see this in the Bible. For instance, in Revelation, we see the scene in heaven when the angels, living creatures and the elders are around the throne. In response to the Lamb, they say with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing" (Revelation 5:12). They were responding to God. When Jesus appeared to Thomas and let him put his finger into the place of the nails and put his hand into His side, Thomas responded in worship by saying, "My Lord and My God!" Thomas was responding to God.

John Piper repeats the thought, "Forms of worship should provide two things: channels for the mind to apprehend the truth of God's reality, and channels for the heart to respond to the beauty of that truth - that is, forms to ignite the affections with biblical truth, and forms to express the affections with biblical passion. Of course, good forms do both. Good sermons and hymns and prayers express and inspire worship." (Desiring God, p. 81).

Today, there are many discussions in this whole area of worship. Much of it focuses on hymns vs. choruses. Let me simply say that the issue isn't hymns vs. choruses. **The issue is spirit and truth.**

Choruses are often sprinkled with truth, rather than being packed. As such, they enable us to focus much attention on our spirit in singing. However, they are often repeated so often, that their little truth is further diluted and spirit becomes such a domineering focus. We went to a church this morning which had the following words at one point in the song: "Holy, holy, holy, holy, holy, holy, holy, holy, holy ... holy, holy, holy, holy, holy, holy, holy, holy, holy). To help you, that was 18X that we sang "holy." Obviously it is true, but the repetition dilutes the ability to focus on the truth of it.

Let me say a few things, real practically about our worship at Rock Valley Bible Church.

You all have a tremendous responsibility in the cultivation of our worship together. You need to be worshipping in your homes and throughout the week. Our gatherings are enhanced when we are worshipers in "all our ways." As Geoffrey Thomas said, "There is no way that those who neglect secret worship can know communion with God in the public services of the Lord's Day" (Worship in Spirit, p. 8, as quoted by Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, p. 87).

In your worship, don't seek a religious feeling. We live in an entertainment driven society. As such, it is easy for us to think of our Sunday worship services as entertainment to be enjoyed and evaluated. But don't evaluate a worship service by asking yourself, "How did the worship service make **me** feel." But rather, you ought to ask, "How did it make **God** feel?" That is the issue. You need to ask, "**Was God pleased with my worship?**"

Most people think of church as a show. Those in front are the entertainers, God is the topic, and the congregation is the audience. However, in truth, God is the audience and the congregation is putting on "the performance." We are seeking to please an audience of One, the Sovereign God of the universe!

I have been humbled this week in my study of my tremendous responsibility to lead you all in the worship of God. (This also pertains to you other men, who stand up here and lead other aspects of our worship or to future musical leaders of this congregation).

Jonathan Edwards appropriately demonstrated this balance in preaching. He said, "If a minister has light without heat, and entertains his [hearers] with learned discourses, without a savour of the power of godliness, or any appearance of fervency of spirit, and zeal for God and the good of souls, he may gratify itching ears, and fill the heads of his people with empty notions; but it will not be very likely to reach souls. And if, on the other hand, he be driven on with a fierce and intemperate zeal, and vehement heat, without light, he will be likely to kindle the like unhallowed flame in his people, and to fire their corrupt passions and affections; but will make them never the better, nor lead them a step towards heaven, but drive them apace the other way" (The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume Two, p. 958).

One concluding thought

This is a great encouragement! God is seeking worshipers of Him. Those who are truly worshiping God will be found by Him. God will delight in them!

This is also a warning! God is requiring true worship of Him. May the Lord find Rock Valley Bible Church to be filled with true worshipers.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on October 7, 2001 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.