

Chapter 11

Maintaining True Worship

“... the true worshippers shall worship
the Father in spirit and in truth: ...”
– John 4:23

Continuing the series about being the church that people need, in John 4:23-24 Christ's talking to the woman at the well. Jesus is doing the speaking, "*But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such,*" this is those who worship in spirit and truth, "*to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*"

In these verses, Jesus speaks of worship, which is one of the most important and misunderstood subjects in the word of God today. As He speaks upon this subject, you'll notice in verse 24, He uses the imperative, "*they that worship must*" to stress the importance of worship. It also states that worship has an established and an unbending standard, and that there are no alternatives, substitutes, or replacements. *They that worship Him must.* Worship of God can not be in a self-styled manner or just however people feel, however people want to worship. There's a "*must*" here.

Concerning worship, He also says that there are true worshipers, referring to those who worship in accordance with a standard, those who worship correctly and accurately. Since it says there are true worshipers, that implies that there are false worshipers, that there is a worship that is erroneous. There is a worship that is correct and there is a worship that is incorrect. There is true worship, there is false worship. There is genuine worship, and there is counterfeit worship.

Jesus said in verse 23, "*... the true worshipers shall worship the Father ...*" Therefore, true worship must have the proper object, that being God the Father. God is also our motive for worship. You can not worship a goddess and have true worship, there has to be the worship of God the Father. You can't just worship what you think is God.

We also see that true worship is in spirit. That speaks of the nature and the character of worship. It is to be done spiritually. I believe that it can only be done by those who have a spiritual nature. I don't believe a lost man can

worship the Lord in spirit and in truth, which is the only worship the Lord accepts. So it is done spiritually, which is the opposite of that which is external.

We see not only the nature of worship, but that it must be done in truth. That is, it must be according to truth. He went on to say, “*for the Father seeketh such*”, those who worship in spirit and truth, “*to worship him.*” That means that He desires such, He delights in such, He accepts such worship. It's not that He needs true worship, but He is pleased with true worship. Since God seeks true worship, that tells us that how you worship is not a matter of indifference to God, because He seeks such to worship Him. There are people today who say, “Well it doesn't matter.” Well, it does matter! “They must worship me”, in spirit and truth and God seeketh such to worship Him. God is not indifferent concerning the way that you and I worship. God is not indifferent concerning how we worship.

Jesus also declares the nature of God. He says, God is a spirit in John 4:24. In the context of that, He speaks the imperative. “*God is a spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.*” In other words, because of who and what God is, He must be worshiped in a certain and specific way. God is a spirit, therefore, we must worship in spirit and in truth.

Most of what is termed worship today is centered around the flesh rather than the spiritual. It is external, outward, rather than internal. Most worship today is very inconsiderate of the person, nature and character of God and therefore, it is not in reverence. All worship must be in reverence.

Worship of God can not be in a self-styled manner. Worship that is pleasing to the flesh is not acceptable to God. The only worship acceptable to God, first of all, must have a right motive, a right object. God must be the object. Not the God that you invent in your heart and mind; it must have God the Father as the object. There has to be a right attitude, it must be in spirit, there must be a right standard, and there

must be truth. Anything else is classified, under what Jesus called in Matthew 15:8-9, as vain worship. It's a waste of time. It's empty. It means nothing.

It is also ignorant worship. In Acts 17:22-23, remember Paul on Mars hill? He referred to the God "*whom you ignorantly worship.*" Worship outside of worshiping God in spirit and truth is ignorant worship and is also classified as "will worship." Colossians 2:23 speaks of will worship, that is worship in a self-styled manner. It speaks of just worshiping however you feel, however you please, however you determine. That's "will worship". It's all vain and a waste of time.

One of the primary functions of the church is to worship God. That is one of our primary functions. When we assemble, it is to worship, it is to worship God, and therefore, there must be a proper environment and a proper atmosphere. Churches can get in such a way that they no longer have a proper environment and a proper atmosphere to worship God. Your heart must be right with God in order to have a proper environment, in order to have a proper atmosphere. If there is fussing, fighting, and warring going on, that is not conducive to worshiping God in spirit and truth.

When the objective is to draw a crowd, keep the people coming, be loved and accepted, be popular, as we have already seen, we begin to add to and take from the things of God. When those things become our objective, we begin to add to the worship. The only thing you and I can add is that which is of the flesh. We begin to add and subtract from worship. All of this, as Jeremiah 2:33 says, in order to be loved.

The desire to be loved, the desire to be accepted by the world, has resulted in the secularization of worship. It has resulted in the modernizing and the revamping of the worship service in an attempt to give the ungodly what they want. Worship is changed. I tell you today, worship does not need to be updated. Worship never needs to be updated,

because we are worshipping God and God does not change and worship is according to truth and truth does not change. Worship does not need updating and worship services do not need updating. We can worship without a piano, an organ, pews, air conditioning, any of those things. Those things are not necessary to worship. We're not criticizing any of those things, but those things are not necessary for worship.

What is necessary is that our hearts are right with God. The desire for love and acceptance by the world, the desire of popularity with the world, any attempt to give the ungodly what they want, has turned what should be worship of God into entertainment. If you're going to draw the ungodly, you're going to have to entertain their flesh. Just preaching the word of God is not going to draw the ungodly. Even if they come in, and unless God does a work in their heart, just preaching the word of God, is not going to keep them coming. If you want to keep them coming, if that's your concern, you're going to have to do something that appeals to their flesh, unless God is working upon their heart.

This desire to be loved and accepted has turned worship services into entertainment and the amusement of the ungodly. Spiritual songs begin to be replaced with music and songs that appeal to the flesh of man. This desire to be loved and accepted has turned what should be the house of worship into a social gathering and activity center. It has shifted the focus from God to man. You can not worship unless the focus is on God. You can not give the enemies of God and the ungodly what they want and maintain a proper environment and a proper atmosphere for worship.

This message is on the subject of maintaining true worship. If we're going to be the church that people need, we must maintain a proper environment, a proper atmosphere of worship, and we must maintain true worship. Therefore, it becomes incumbent upon every member of Home Baptist Church or every member of a local body to worship God in spirit and in truth.

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Every member of one of the Lord's local churches has entered into covenant agreement to sustain the worship of that local body. That is an agreement that we have made with the spirit of God. That is an agreement that members of the Lord's local churches have entered into with one another, that each church member will sustain the worship of the church body they belong to. That means we'll keep our hearts right, that means that we'll be here. It also means that we'll keep our hearts right with God, that we'll keep our hearts in a condition to worship the Lord.

This means that there must be a guarding against all intrusions. There are many intrusions to true worship. We could preach another message on that subject. Self will, worldliness, a wrong spirit, all of these things are intrusions to true worship. It is absolutely necessary, if we're going to be the church that people need, we must maintain true worship.

In maintaining worship, we must maintain all the ingredients of worship. I believe most of the ingredients of true worship are illustrated in Abraham offering his son, Issac. The story is told in Genesis 22:1-14. We want to point out several things from these verses.

First of all, worship involves a revelation from God. Worship involves God revealing Himself. It involves you and I responding to what God has revealed and to the word of God. In Genesis 22:1-2, God comes to Abraham and tells him what He wanted him to do. "I want you to go and I want you to offer your son." This is not something that Abraham came up with; this is something God told him to do. The way to worship is not what you and I come up with, it is simply the revelation of God. Then Abraham, of course, as you read through the verses, obeyed God, which tells us that worship must be in accordance with the word of God. This is what Jesus said; it is in spirit and truth.

God and Abraham were in contact there in verses 1-2. There must be contact with God. You can not worship if you do not come into contact with the Lord. Unless you come

into contact with the Lord, you're not doing any better than bowing down to a statue. There has to be contact with the Lord. If there is no contact with the Lord, then our hearts are not right. If there's no contact with the Lord then we've missed the whole point of worship. How often people go through the motions of worship, but they never come into contact with the Lord. Some never ever come close. It's not worship. It's all vain. It's all empty.

Worship involves preparation. In Genesis 22:2, God instructed Abraham. He said, *"Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah;"*, he was to go to a specific place, you can't just go anywhere, *"and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of."* Then in verse 3, *"And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him."* He put a saddle on the mule, he cut all the wood. What Abraham was doing here was making preparations to do what God had told them to do. You can not worship without preparation.

Worship requires a preparation of heart. John said, in Revelations 1: 9, *"I was in the spirit on the Lord's day."* That doesn't just happen automatically. Sunday doesn't just roll around and all of a sudden you're in the spirit on the Lord's day. It takes preparation. It takes preparation to worship the Lord, it requires a preparation of the heart, dying to self, drawing close to the Lord, getting ready to worship the Lord. That's why I believe it is important what you do on Saturday evening, because you ought to be preparing for Sunday worship on Saturday evening.

We also see worship is by faith and obedience to the Lord. In Genesis 22:3, *"he went to the place of which God had told him."* He did exactly what God said. You can't be disobedient and worship God. You have to worship Him just as he says. This, of course, requires faith, this requires obedience to the Lord.

We see that worship involves a costly presentation to God. In Genesis 22:2, God told Abraham that, concerning his only son Issac. In verse 9, *“And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there,”* there is more preparation, *“and laid the wood in order,”* more preparation, *“and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.”*

Worship is not something that's cheap. It's you and I making a presentation to God. They were to bring the first fruits to the house of God. They were to do so in thanksgiving. There was to be a presentation. Here Abraham was to present his son to the Lord. This was the very failure of Israel in the days of Malachi in Malachi 1:7-8. God was offended by their offerings. He said, *“... you bring the blind, the lame, why don't you take them to your governor and see if he wants them.”* We have a tendency to do that. We have a tendency to give God less than we would give man. God rebuked Israel for that. Worship is to be the best we can present to the Lord. It is not something that's cheap. There must be a willingness to present the very best that we have.

Worship also involves a separation unto God. In Genesis 22:5, *“And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.”* Abraham believed that God was going to spare Issac, he said we will come again unto you. Worship requires faith, too. Worship requires a separation, *“We go yonder”*, we go yonder and worship. In order for you and I to worship God, we have to say to all of our home cares, to all of our business affairs, to all of our hobbies, to all of our recreations, to all of our worldly interests, *“abide ye here while I go yonder and worship the Lord.”* When we come into the house of God, we're to leave everything else behind. That means not only physically, but that means mentally. We are to leave, we are to get all of those things out of our mind as we come to worship God.

That's not an easy thing to do and it requires a lot of effort and a lot of preparation. You can't just stumble into the house of God and worship; it doesn't happen that way. There has to be a separation.

This is a separation, a withdrawing from the world, and a drawing near to God. In a day of cellphones, (I'm not going to get off on this because I'd go on and on,) we don't know anything about withdrawing from this world. We really don't. People drag their cellphones to church. What are you going to do if you get a call? What are you going to do, get up and leave? "Well it's an emergency." What did they do in emergencies before they had a cellphone? What you're doing is you're saying, "I'm going to worship God, but if I get this call, sorry God." We don't know what it is to separate from the world anymore. We really don't. As a result, there is very little worship of the Lord. Worship involves a separation from the world.

Worship involves a renunciation of self. In Genesis 22:6, Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, laid it upon Issac his son, that's a renunciation of self. For Abraham to lay that wood on his son, he had to deny himself. He had to deny every human feeling, every human emotion that he was having at that time. He had to deny it all. There was a renunciation of self. That is something we know very little of today.

Worship involves thoughtfulness. You do not come to worship empty headed. Worship requires great thought. Worship requires meditation. There in verse 6, as he's preparing the wood and he's laying the wood upon Issac, his son, don't you think Abraham was thinking? Certainly he was. He took the fire in his hand, and the knife, they went both of them together. I believe Abraham was thinking very deeply. Not necessarily about his son but about God. *"And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father; and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a*

lamb". He gave great thought. Worship requires great thoughtfulness.

We also see worship involves an open ear and yielding to God's word. In Genesis 22:10 we see, "*And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.*" Isaiah 6 is a good picture of this also. Isaiah heard God speak. His ear was open and there was a response to the Lord. We see that there must be an open ear and there must be a yielding to the word of God. God spoke and Abraham said, "Lord Here am I, here am I."

Worship involves a recognition and a proclamation of God's goodness and greatness. Verse 14, "*And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen.*" After all was said and done, Abraham recognized the goodness and the grace and the mercy of God. Abraham proclaimed the goodness and grace of God. In all worship there is a proclamation of the greatness of God. All worship must have a proclamation of the greatness of God, all worship must be for the honor of God.

If we're going to be the church that people need, we have to maintain true worship. That means a maintaining of the ingredients of worship. It also means a maintaining of a love and desire for the house of worship. You know God did not tell the gentiles in the old testament, "go to the place that I have chosen." He told that to His chosen people. "You go to the place where I have chosen." If there was to be a sacrifice made, if they were to worship God, if they were to bring an offering to God, they were to go to the place where God had chosen. God still has a chosen place today, that being the Lord's house. That's where we're to worship.

There must be a maintaining of a love and a desire for the house of God. Notice in Psalm 84:1, the Psalmist reveals his heart's desire for the Lord's house. He says, "*How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts!*" That is, the

house of God to him was delightful, it was very pleasing, it was a place where he found pleasure. Not fleshly pleasure, but a place where he found spiritual pleasure. It was a place that he found fascinating, where he found satisfaction, that he saw as a beautiful place, a place that he relished. He said in Psalm 26:8, *“I have loved the habitation of thy house”*. He said, I love being in the house of God, I love being there. In Psalm 122:1, he said, *“I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD.”* If we're going to be the church that people need, the members of Home Baptist Church must find God's house to be a place of delight, a place of pleasure, the most fascinating, most interesting, most satisfying, and the most beautiful place in the world to us. The place we relish to be more than anywhere else. This is to show in our words, attitudes, and practice. For those tonight who say, “Oh the house of God means so much to me”, and yet every chance they get, they're gone, they say differently by their practice. They say that they have other interests. What if every other member in the church did that. You wouldn't be the church that people need because you wouldn't even be a church.

The place of worship was the most desirable in the world for the Psalmist. The reason is, because he recognized it as the Lord's. He said in Psalm 84:1, *“thy tabernacles”*. In verse 2, he referred to it as “the courts of the Lord”. In verse 3, *“thine alters”*. In verse 4, *“thy house”*. In verse 10, *“thy courts”*, and *“the house of my God”*. He recognized it as the house of the Lord. It belonged to God. It belongs to the Lord. For that reason alone, it ought to be precious. But, that's not the only reason. That's where God meets with His people.

As you read through the Psalm 84, you see that the psalmist found safety in the house of God. He began to look about and meditate upon the sparrows that had built a nest in the house of God. In verse 3 he said, *“Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young”*. That's what the house of God is. It's a

home where you can bring up your children. *“Even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house:”* Not those who frequented it every now and then, blessed are they who dwell there. They're always there. Blessed are these people.

Then notice Psalms 84:10, *“... a day in thy courts is better than a thousand.”* A day in thy courts is better than a thousand. A thousand days is 2 years and 9 months. He'd rather spend one day in the house of God, and that's better than 2 years and 9 months anywhere else. That's what he is saying. I'm sorry, but there aren't very many that believe that today. There are very few.

Again verse 10, *“For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand.”* He said that as a matter of fact; just stated it as a fact, as a matter of certainty and conviction. One single day in the Lord's house is better than a thousand anywhere else. It's better than a thousand days of family reunions, vacation, visiting, hunting, fishing, going to a ball game. One day is better than a thousand days out on the lake. There aren't many that believe that. That's what the Psalmist believed.

When he says, *“it is better”*, he means it's superior, more advantageous, more useful, more valuable to me than a thousand days anywhere else. And yet today, people say, “Oh, I've got an opportunity of a lifetime to go to such and such. I won't be there the next 2 or 3 Sundays, but this is the opportunity of a lifetime.” In other words, they're saying, “I don't believe that a day in the Lord's house is better than a thousand days of what I'm about to do, I don't believe it.” The Palmist said a day in the Lord's house is better than 2 years and 9 months anywhere else.

That being his conviction, he went on to say, *“I had rather”*, that speaks of preference; I prefer, I would prefer to, *“be a doorkeeper”*, the lowest position in God's house at that time, *“in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.”* Oh, I would prefer to take the lowest position in the house of God than to be with ungodly wicked sinners

of the world. I prefer that. God help us because this is the attitude that we need if we're going to maintain a spirit of worship. The house of God was amiable, it was desirable to the Psalmist. We can not be the church that people need if we do not love the house of the Lord.

We can not be the church that people need if we are not a people of worship. We have to worship the Lord. Choosing not to worship in God's house, is what Hebrews 10:25 talks about, "... *forsaking the assembly of ourselves ... , as the manner of some is; ...* ", or as the habit of some is. It's a habit, it's a bad habit. I don't care if it's 3 months, 6 months, 9 months. It's their habit and it's bad.

When any member gets in a habit of forsaking the assembling of themselves, they are no longer sustaining the worship of Home Baptist Church. Put any time limit you want on it, that's not what it's truly about. It's their habit, it's "*as the manner of some is.*" There's enough people that are smart enough to play the game, "I'll come once every 3 months, I'll come once every 6 months whatever the church's rule is." It's their habit. To me it doesn't matter, you come once every 3 months, you ought to be disciplined. "Well, the church says every three months." It's their habit. You've got a habit of forsaking the assembly of yourself. (That's another message also. The trouble with preaching on church attendance is, the ones that need to hear it aren't here.)

Choosing, (Yes, I said CHOOSING), not to worship in God's house demonstrates thinking lightly upon spiritual things. I've been told a million times, "You can't know my heart." No, I can't know everything that's going on in it. Or, "You can't know my relationship with God." Oh yes I can. You're not in God's house, you chose not to be there, I guarantee you do not have a very good relationship with the Lord. It involves a choosing not to do that which is known to be right. A child of God, a church member, knows the right thing to do is to be in God's house. When you choose not to be there, you're choosing not to do what you KNOW is right, and that of course is wrong.

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It's also choosing not to give or receive needed encouragement. We see in Hebrews 10, that we're to assemble to encourage one another and you choose not to do that. Then they have the audacity to say, "I haven't been there in 6 months and only 2 people called me." How many did you call in those 6 months? You chose not to receive encouragement by staying away. You chose that. That's a choice that you made.

It contributes to spiritual ignorance. "Well I can worship God at home." Not according to God's word. You can't do that and dismiss God's house. You can't do that while you're forsaking God's house. You can't worship God anywhere you're in the spirit to worship. You have to be in the right spirit to worship.

It sets a bad example, a terrible example to young people. It sets a terrible example to every member of the church. It's a discouragement to others, and you choose to do that. It demonstrates one's priorities are not properly arranged. Choosing not to assemble is one of those things, if everyone else chose to do what you're doing, there wouldn't be a church.

If we're going to be the church that people need, we must maintain true worship. There must be an atmosphere, there must be an environment where we can worship the Lord. We must come with our hearts right with God in order to worship the Lord. Years and years and years ago, there was a man who was very inconsistent with his church attendance, but at the same time he was very good at inviting others to church, which I could never figure out. One Sunday morning, somebody that he invited came. Guess what? The one who invited them wasn't there. The man asked, and I said, "I don't know where he is." He came 2 or 3 weeks in a row and never did see the one who invited him. How sad. We need to have a love for God's house.

I realize that things happen, and we can't always get to the house of God. But, I also realize that many times people choose, they make choices, "I'm not going to be in

God's house today.” They make that choice. They make that choice a week before. They may make it the night before. “I'm not going to be there.”

The longer they stay away, the harder it becomes to go, because now, they take the attitude, “Well when I come, people are going to be judging me.” Let me tell you something, they already have! You haven't been there; you chose not to be there; what does that tell me? That tells me you don't care. If you begin to forsake the assembling of yourself, don't tell me how everybody in church is uncaring. I don't want to hear it; I don't have any patients for it. Don't tell me that, because by you not being there, you're the uncaring one. You're the one that doesn't care.

Don't tell me that you're praying for everybody that's there. You don't even know what's going on. People get mad at me because I did not call them and tell them that so and so was having surgery. “If you would have been here, you would have known. I didn't know you cared, I really didn't think you cared or you'd have been here and you would have known. I'm not going out of my way to let you know everything that's going on at the church that you should have been at.” God help us to maintain a love for the house of God.

There's a hunger to be in God's house. When David wrote these Psalms, he wasn't able to be in the house of God. He was longing for the house of God. He was a fugitive. How many times do people weep because they can't be in the house of God as often as they want because of health reasons or whatever. They are broken hearted. Then, you have people who just choose, and it doesn't bother them a bit. They just decide, “I'm not going.” God help us to always have that love, to always have that desire for the Lord's house.