



Learn to Worship

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Exodus 20:22-26

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²² And the LORD said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the people of Israel: 'You have seen for yourselves that I have talked with you from heaven. ²³ You shall not make gods of silver to be with me, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold. ²⁴ An altar of earth you shall make for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you. ²⁵ If you make me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stones, for if you wield your tool on it you profane it. ²⁶ And you shall not go up by steps to my altar, that your nakedness be not exposed on it."

(Pastor Prays)

For those of you that like to read history, you know that December 7th, 1941, is what Franklin Delano Roosevelt called a day that will live in infamy. It's the day that Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, plunging America into the Second Great War. It's always been characterized as a surprise attack. Even FDR, when he made the announcement, called it a surprise attack by the Japanese. And although it is called a surprise attack, it was not all a surprise. There was information available to serve as a warning to the United States that Japan was going to attack. In the fall of 1941, diplomatic relations had broken off between Japan and America. In fact, if you go right up to the date of the attack, December 7th, the day before, they had seen many Japanese submarines in the harbor itself. But I think the worst example of having the

information happened at 7 o'clock in the morning on December 7th. Private George Eliot was in charge. He was manning the northernmost radar station on the island of Oahu. That's when, as he looked at the radar, he noticed a really large blip on the radar. But he didn't have any authority. He was just a private, so he called the information center. And remember, it's Sunday morning at 7 o'clock, nobody is there. He made several calls, and finally, Lieutenant Kermit Tyler answered the phone. He talked to the private and let him know we had some B-17 bombers returning to Oahu. That's probably what he was seeing. All the information was there, but the wrong interpretation and a misuse of information made it so that America, without warning, suffered the worst attack in U.S. naval history. We were plunged into five years of what we know as World War II. They had the information, they just didn't do anything with it.

Now, in the same sort of way, the people of God have the information. You have the information. But it's not enough just to have the information; you've got to do the right thing with the information. The people of God have stood at the mountain of God and heard the Ten Commandments. They know what God requires. And here in this passage, after giving the Ten Commandments, God now tells the people what the appropriate response to hearing about God actually is. And we find out in this passage that the appropriate response is worship.

Worship involves a combination of things that must be done and things that must not be done. And what I hope to do is use this passage to hopefully inform and encourage you on how we worship the living God of the Bible, because here's the thing:

How You Worship Will Show in How You Live

How you worship God will show up in how you live your life. Let's think through what worship actually looks like. Let me offer up a couple of suggestions. Here's the first one, number one.

Worship must be dominated by the word

The worship of God must be dominated by the word of God. If someone comes to you and tells you, look, God has told me to tell you something, you get away from that person. Unless that person says, God has told me to tell you something and opens the Bible and reads it to you out loud, that's how you know God is speaking in his word. What does the word of God do for us? The word of God tells us why we worship. The word of God tells us who we worship. The word of God tells us how we worship. The Bible tells us even when we worship.

Hickory Grove is a Protestant church. In fact, it's beyond being a Protestant church. Hickory Grove is a Baptist church. We are inheritors of something called the Protestant Reformation. The Protestant Reformation started in the 15th and 16th centuries, several hundred years ago, by men like John Wickliffe, John Huss, Martin Luther, and William Tyndale. And if you go back and study all of those early reformers, all they were doing was getting the Bible into the language of people so they could know what God says. All they did was unlock the Bible that had been trapped for 1,000 years in Latin so that you and I could have a translation of the Bible. I'm reading from the English Standard Version of the Bible. If you go to my house, I've got a New American Standard Version of the Bible. I have a New International NIV version. I got the Living Bible, that's kind of the Bible. I've got it in my house. I've got all sorts of Bibles in the English language that help me know what God says. If English is not your first language, you could find it on your phone in the language you have learned and you could hear what God's word says to us.

Why is that important? The psalmist tells us why in Psalm 19:7 and following. The psalmist says, *The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.* Hey, is your soul down? You know how you'll be lifted up? By God's word. *the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.* Hey, are you a simple person? Do people think that you're dumb? Read the Bible, you'll get smart. The precepts of the Lord are right in rejoicing the heart. Is your heart down and you're depressed? Go to God's word that's going to lift you up and strengthen

you. The rules of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. What am I trying to say? That the Bible tells us how to worship and our worship must be dominated by the Bible.

I want to offer three areas in life where I think God's word must master you. There are lots of areas. Maybe every area of life, but let me just pick out three. The first one is at church. Church, Hickory Grove, our purpose must be defined by what the Bible says. Why do we actually get together on the Lord's Day? Is it a tent revival? What are we doing on Sunday morning? We are here to glorify God and worship him. That is the purpose of gathering on a Sunday morning. We have gathered for worship. We aim to worship God the Father, through God the Son, by God the Holy Spirit.

Not only that, we've got to know our purpose. We also need to know our mission. Why do we gather and worship to glorify God? Then what happens after that? Well, the Bible tells us that our mission is to see people come to Christ. We should put signs at the exit of every parking lot that you can see on the way out, saying, "You are now entering your mission field." Because God has called you not just to Sunday to worship, but to live your life during the week sharing the gospel with people. Not only that, the Bible tells us what our doctrine is, what we believe. When you visit our website at Hickory Grove, you can find our statement of faith, along with several other statements that outline what we believe. Every one of them comes right out of the Bible, which is why we do church the way we do it. Why do we have pastors? Why do we have deacons? It comes right out of the Bible. Why do we do the Lord's Supper? And before that, why do we do baptism? It comes right out of the Bible.

Not only that, the Bible tells us what sort of tone we are to use when addressing one another. Everybody here, we all know somebody where it's not so much what that guy says, it's how he says it that bothers us. Why do we think like that? We get that from the Bible. The Bible says that we are to speak the truth, do it boldly, speak the truth in what? Yeah, in love. It matters how you actually say the thing. The Bible tells us what our message is. The

Bible tells us, and that must dominate our worship at church, but not just church.

The Bible informs how we live our lives at work, how we do what we do at work. Don't forget now, work is not a curse from the fall. When God made Adam and Eve, and put them in the garden, and told them to take care of the garden, that was work. Now, when the fall came and sin entered in, it affected work, but work didn't come from sin. Work is something good God has given us, and the Bible informs how we do what we do at work. When you see yourself at work, and even if you hate your job, the Bible says you are not working for man, you are working unto the Lord. Or let's just say you live your life working a job, or maybe you've retired from your job, or maybe you're working at home and you earn a certain amount of money that you are buying a car with, or a house with, or groceries with. That provision, do you see that as a provision from the Lord? Or when you enter your place of employment, when you go to work and people know that you are a Christian, are you actually adorning the gospel? Is your life one that makes other people want to know the God that you say that you worship?

Or not just church or work. The Bible ought to be an umbrella over your home. Listen to me. I'm thinking about marriage. Any of you here who are married, or hope to be married, what you ought to do is, in your own personal time, turn your Bible to Ephesians 5. And if you are a husband, go and read what the Bible says in Ephesians chapter 5 about how a husband is to love his wife like Christ loves the church and gave himself up for her so that she might flourish. Go and read it. Or if you're a wife, go and read. How is the wife to treat her husband, to be submissive to him, full of respect for him? Why do you do that? Because Ephesians 5 says, your marriage now becomes a picture of the gospel. Now, let me ask you married people, is your marriage a picture of the gospel? Would you, just in your heart and mind, maybe where you're sitting right now, start repenting to the Lord? Maybe you've got the worst spouse in this building. That's not enough of an excuse for you not to honor God in the situation you are in. God has called you to live in such a way that your life now honors God as a picture of the gospel; you, the husband or the

wife, or the children. And we even have instructions on how children are to live and how we are to raise our children. Why is that there? It's not just to show you what a home should look like. It is a reminder that the gospel is on the line. The sanctity of everything that God gives us is on the line. That our worship should be dominated by the word. Let me go quickly. That's the first point. Let me give you the second. Worship is not only dominated by the word, number two.

Worship must be free from compromise

Compromise, or watering down. Let me show you where I get that. You'll see it in verse 23. Notice what the Lord says. ²³ *You shall not make gods of silver to be with me, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold.* So right there is a restatement of the second commandment. The first command is to worship the Lord your God. The second commandment is, you shall not make any graven images, you shall not have any idols. This is the second commandment. And you'll find the second commandment all through the Bible. Why is it there? Because we are prone to idolatry. In fact, one of the reformers, John Calvin, said it like this: the human heart is an incessant idol factory. Our hearts create idols for us to worship.

What does the text say? The Lord says in verse 23, don't make any idol of silver to be with me, to water down the holiness of God. Now, we do that in a couple of ways. One way is that we must always make sure we are not allowing worldliness into worship. I see it all over. The American Evangelical Church is fascinated with entertainment. Now, I hate to see churches capitulate to that. Sometimes I'll see it in summertime. The churches will do something like this. It's going to be summertime at the movies. So every Sunday the preacher will take a movie, and then that movie will be the topic of the sermon, and the sermon is let's learn lessons from that movie. I'm going to tell you what lesson I learned. That's dumb. Just open the Bible. Or not only that, how about gimmicks? I can't do gimmicks. So we've got Easter coming up. There will be churches, I don't know of any in our area, but there will be churches that will have a gimmick to try to get people to come to church on

Easter. The only problem with gimmicks to get people to come to church is if you get them to come to church with a gimmick, you've got to use gimmicks to keep them at your church. So you'll see churches that'll do something like this. If you come to our church on Easter Sunday, we'll have a raffle, and you'll have a chance to win a car, a new car here at Hickory Grove. Look, we're never going to do any of that. If you all want to go sometime and try to win that raffle and bring that car back here, that's fine. The Bible says, how do we see people come to church? It's not by gimmicks. Jesus said, "If I be lifted up, I will draw all men to myself."

Not only that, just sometimes the message in the church, the lightness, lacking the cross, never getting to the gospel, never talking about repentance, never speaking about the need for Jesus and his death on the cross and his resurrection, and what that transformation brings. Or the Lord's Day service. I think about churches that sometimes on the Sunday between Christmas and New Year's, oftentimes there are not that many people that come to church, and so churches will just cancel church altogether. I don't understand that. Do I sound like a ranting old man right now? I feel like it a little bit. Or speaking of a ranting old man, I think about how sometimes pastors my age, I'm 57 years old, and I have no business showing up in a pair of skinny jeans. You're not 25 years old, get those things off. You need some pleats in your britches. All right, so you all got me distracted. I'm going to be in trouble when I get home.

All of that to say: we've got to be careful that worldliness doesn't creep into our worship service. Why? Because God says, don't have silver and gold with me. Speaking of silver and gold, you know what else is distracting sometimes? It is when you actually get comfortable in your living. If you're young, you're probably broke. If you're young and married, you're really broke. If you're young and married with children, you'll dig out of the hole at some point. Those kids will be gone. You'll get a raise at some point when they leave. The problem with having enough money is that the more you make, the more danger you face. When you're broke, you know you're dependent on God. You're like, Lord, please, we need this money to pay the rent. So you're asking God, you know you're dependent on God. When you have enough, you forget

that you actually are still dependent on God. You have just forgotten it. Be careful how we worship. It's showing how we live. So we want to be dominated by the word. The second thing is we want to be free from compromise. Let me give you a third, number three.

Worship should be genuinely simple

It should be simple. I got that from verses 24 and 25. Look at the altars. Verse 24, ²⁴ *An altar of earth you shall make for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen.* Come down to verse 25. So if you're going to make one of stone, verse 25, ²⁵ *If you make me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stones, for if you wield your tool on it you profane it.* So, in other words, don't make something fancy in verse 25; make something simple in verse 24. It's just made out of the earth. Later in Exodus and Leviticus, there are detailed instructions on the altar, the tabernacle, and all of those. Right here, they've just heard from God - the Ten Commandments. He's calling on them to worship. For now, they need something simple and quick. I think that informs how we worship; it should be simple. Don't overthink. Don't over-ritualize.

I was thinking about this the other day. Several years ago, I'd flown into India. David Platt, who was the International Mission Board President at the time, asked me to come help him with something he was working on. So I flew into India. We're going to go to church that Sunday. Well, I got in about 2 o'clock on Sunday morning, and church was early that day. So he and I are in the back of a taxi. We're on the way to church. It's a small church service. There'll be 50 or so people there. And while we are on the way, I said, "David, what are you preaching on today?" And he said, "I'm not preaching, you're preaching." I said, "I'm not preaching." He said, "Yeah, you're preaching. That's why you're here. The people are expecting you to preach." And I said, "David, I've been flying all day. I haven't had any chance to prepare. I'm not ready to preach." And David said, "I mean, you've got the Bible and the Holy Spirit, isn't that enough?" There's a little bit of a Jesus juke on me just then. But he's right. If you've got the Word of God and you have the Spirit of God, that's enough.

When we gather together to worship, we should simply be worshipping God the Father through God the Son by God the Spirit. Our worship should be Christ-centered so that if anybody comes in here and they've never come to church before and they come and sit through our church service, they should be able, by the time they leave, to understand how you can become a Christian through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The worship service should be saturated with the Bible. It starts with the Bible; then we pray the Bible; we have been singing the Bible; then somebody's going to get up and preach the Bible. Our worship service should be joyful. We actually are people who were once dead in sin, and we have now been made alive together with Christ and saved and adopted by God the Father. We have nothing to worry about, God is our Father.

That worship should be responsive. Before the Protestant Reformation, worship meant standing in a cathedral, watching a priest perform something called Mass, and having no part in it. Now our church service should not be showing up like you're at a theater watching what happens on the stage. Instead, it is us together seeing Christ lifted up and our souls satisfied in Christ. And it doesn't have to be some topic that's going to be applied to you. Just being here to worship, God ministers to your heart and strengthens your soul.

I'm thinking about Kyle and Kerri Scarlett and their daughter in the hospital and the things they've been through in the last 10 days or two weeks. How do they get through? I haven't been preaching on how to handle being in the hospital. I haven't been preaching on any of that. You know how? We gather together to worship God's Word by God's Spirit, and it strengthens God's people.

Tomorrow I'll stand up and preach a funeral service for a ninety-year-old man who was a pillar of our church. And I'll be able to stand there and preach that service with joy in my heart, knowing that although we mourn his loss, we don't mourn as those who don't have any hope because of his commitment to

the gospel and to this church. All of that to say, worship should be genuinely simple. That's three, let me give you a fourth one, number four.

Worship results in mission

There's something that happens. So we gather and lift up the name of Christ and our hearts are strengthened. That strengthening in your heart is for a reason. So you go on mission. Look at the end of verse 24. Let me show it to you. *In every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you.* That's mission. In every place, I'm going to cause my name to be worshiped where it's not presently being worshiped. That is mission. I'm going to establish a place of worship where people can then acknowledge my name.

In 1955, right here on this corner, there was not a church. People were not worshipping here. God established his church, why? So that you could worship. A man named John Piper, a great preacher who's retired now, will be in Charlotte tomorrow, and all of our pastors are going to a pre-conference there to hear him preach. And John Piper, when he talks about missions, says this. Church missions exist because worship does not. We are driven to share the gospel so that people who have never heard the gospel can come to Christ and worship the one true God. It's why we share the gospel. It's why you're going to invite people. It's why here at Hickory Grove, we give to something called Plus One. It's why our church is in the Southern Baptist Convention. 47,000 Southern Baptist churches put our money in one big pot, and out of that pot, we want to send missionaries to remote parts of the world where the gospel light is not shining. They can stay there and preach the gospel. Why? Because we believe that missions exist because worship does not exist. Or planting churches in parts of America where the gospel light is not burning, or training missionaries and pastors in our seminaries. Why do we do that? We do that so that God will use us to cause his name to be worshipped where it was not previously known. Worship prompts you to

do something, so here's what I'm asking you to do. When you worship today, after worship, when you leave here, you pray for the one person whom God puts on your mind and heart. Who is it you know that needs to come to church? And then you go and share this week with the one person that God has put on your heart to invest in them and invite them. You can even use this card. It's a good tool. You say, "I'd like for you to come to Hickory Grove, and here's what's going on in our church. Here's where it is and I'll even take you." Not only that, you need to show hospitality to the one that you are inviting. What I mean is go across the street. If they show up at church, take them to lunch. You are showing hospitality. Why? So that the gospel is adorned. So that person who doesn't know Christ will come to see the joy of following Jesus. Worship does something. That's four, let me give you this fifth one. I had a little buyer's remorse on this fifth point. I felt good about it yesterday. I felt good about it this morning when I was going over the sermon, but standing here in front of you, I don't feel as good about it. But we're here, so I'll give it to you. Here's number five.

Worship is marked by purity

Let me show you where I get that. Come down to verse 26. I don't know why this verse is here. God has put it here for something and I've been thinking about it. The Lord says, ²⁶ *And you shall not go up by steps to my altar, that your nakedness be not exposed on it.* Why? So evidently, the priest would be wearing a robe and not much else. The Lord says, don't climb those steps and let somebody look up under your robe and get distracted. Here's all I can come up with. Why is this here? I think it's here to remind us that modesty matters in worship. Modesty does matter. That decorum in worship will prevent distraction. We don't want anything to happen that might take away from the worship of our holy God. It gives us an open road to the gospel. Let me give you one last one, and I'll call it a day here. What does worship mean? Number six.

Worship means reconciliation

Do you see that in verse 24? I think we left something on the table back there in verse 24. Let's go back and get it. Come back with me to verse 24. What does he say? An altar of earth you shall make for me, a sacrifice on it, your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, sheep and oxen. In verse 24, notice the two types of offerings: a burnt offering and a peace offering. If you read the book of Leviticus, when you get there, you'll see the burnt offering. What is that for? A burnt offering is a sacrifice paid for sins. So if you're offering a burnt offering, you're a sinner, you are going to make a sacrifice. You have in your hand a sheep, which is the sacrifice. You are the sacrificer. And the sacrifice is going to pay for the sins of the sacrificer. The sacrifice, the sheep, will die in the place of the one offering the sheep. The sacrifice dies in the place of the sinner who deserved to die. And that right there is the framework of what Christ has done for us on the cross. Jesus Christ as our substitute, Christ in our place, taking the wrath of God away. And how you become a Christian is that you trust that Jesus died on the cross in your place. That's the burnt offering. The peace offering is an offering that establishes good fellowship with God. You take both of these offerings, a peace offering and a burnt offering, and you put them together, and they both point to Jesus. Jesus, the lamb that was slain before the foundation of the world, in your place, so that you, a sinner, might be reconciled to God and have fellowship with God. That takes you right to the joy of the gospel and the strength of forgiveness and the reality of hope. This passage takes us to Christ to worship him there. And how you worship will show up in how you live.

(Pastor prays)