

What is Biblical Worship?

We have to define what biblical worship is. This is that worship that God wants from us. This is the point. Praise is when we recognize something that God has done for somebody (for their benefit). We can give praise to God for what God has done for Israel. Thanksgiving is a type of praise, because it is personal. It is what God has done personally for me. We have to separate these things from the popular concept of praise, which is emotion, normally caused by worldly music and a show that pulls us emotionally to rise up and excite our emotions.

Worship is a spiritual recognition of God for whom He is. This revolves around understanding and recognizing some aspect of God's moral character. Because of this, in a biblical church, worship is principally focused on teaching, preaching, and exposition in one form or another one or more biblical texts.

Why do we begin with this? This is because very simply biblical worship does not concentrate on the externals of the life of the worshipper. The external forms are not important, or better said, they are not what makes up biblical worship. Biblical worship has to do with what is "spiritual" and the "truth" John 4:23. This is what God wants in true worship. To explain this, we need to understand that true worship is not linked with a site (as in the temple in Jerusalem) nor with an external form. It is linked with a process, where the will of God (the Bible) is explained to the person who wishes to worship God, and then that person's life changes according to that word. His attitudes, actions, and beliefs are different after having worshipped biblically. Moreover God explicitly prohibits the use of images in the worship, such as representations of God or other concepts in the Bible or even outside of the Bible.

No worship other gods, nor images

Exo 20:2 *I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house*

*of bondage. 3 Thou shalt have no other gods before me. 4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: 5 **Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them:** for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;*

Here in the 10 commandments, God prohibits the worship and honoring of other gods. In this context we see the prohibition of the use of images, explicitly the bowing before them, or honoring them in some way. Later God explains to us this commandment is because our God is very jealous, and the wrath and punishment of God is on all who use images. The idea is very clear here that the use of images and the idolatry associated with them is the same thing.

There are not "good" and "bad" images

Moreover we see that there is no such thing as good images and bad images, but the prohibition is wide, for any type of image. The concept of an image is whatever in the sky, in the earth, or under the earth, and this includes everything.

When Paul preached at Ephesus against the religions present there (especially against Diana that had images of silver in her honor), Paul was accused because he said "*they be no gods, which are made with hands*" (**Acts 19.26**). What we understand by that is that every physical thing created by human beings (and equally things that already exist) is without any help in man's worship (even a meteor that fell from hell). The Bible prohibits giving honor or reverence or bowing before these (which is an act of submission, humiliation, and homage to it).

Reverence or Worship?

The Catholics make great arguments that they honor Mary and the saints through these images, but that they don't worship them, preferring the

term "veneration".¹ The word "venerate" does not appear in the Bible.

1Pe 3:15 *But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:*

So the idea of venerating is one of conforming one's character to the character of another person, even though it may be different that your own character, or difficult to do. At the base of this concept is honor, respect, and to give priority of the life to another. We may give a measure of reverence to our parents (Exo. 20:12; Heb 12:9) or to the civil authorities (1Pet 2:17; Rom 13:2-7; Titus 3:1-2; 2Pet 2:10; Jude 1:8), but this is not worship in a spiritual context. To worship God is to allow God to command, control, and manipulate our goals, morals, principles, and eternal life. If one ceases to have respect of their parents or civil authorities, then this becomes sin.

What things are prohibited?

Deu 4:15 *Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the LORD spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire: 16 Lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, **the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female, 17 The likeness of any beast** that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the air, 18 The likeness of any thing that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the waters beneath the earth: 19 And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest **the sun, and the moon, and the stars,** even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the LORD thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven.*

Here God touches on everything that there is as far as being off limits for representation in images. This includes man-likenesses, woman, animal, celestial objects, or even God Himself.

¹ The concept of having reverence for someone is the same as used in worshipping God in the Bible, Neh 1:11; Isa 58:13.

This would mean that representations of Mary, the saints, the apostles, and even of Jesus himself are prohibited from use in a religious context. It is not possible to excuse what God specifically prohibits.

Deu 5:8-9 *Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth: **Thou shalt not bow down** thyself unto them, **nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God**, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me,*

Here we see that we are not to bow down before any image. **Exo 20:5** says that we are not to bow or honor them. Every religious image is for honoring something in some way, invoking the God that is involved in that image. Nobody believes that a painted rock is God, but that the image represents a god somewhere and the painted image is used to represent and honor that god. “Serve” means to work for someone, or to do service or to follow someone. Catholics take pride in being called and recognized as “Gaudalupanos” (from the Virgin of Guadalupe).

Catholics say

“The images help us, nothing more”

Isa 42:8 *I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images. 17 **They shall be turned back, they shall be greatly ashamed, that trust in graven images**, that say to the molten images, Ye are our gods. 44:9 **They that make a graven image are all of them vanity; and their delectable things shall not profit;** (are worthless) and they are their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed. 10 **Who hath formed a god, or molten a graven image that is profitable for nothing?***

God clearly declares that every image is a vain (thing that doesn't have any spiritual or eternal value), and that they “*shall not profit*” and “*profitable for nothing.*” These words mean that they are useless, that there is nothing of

usefulness as far as spiritually in these things. They are totally without utility, worthless, and moreover they cause people to go into idolatry and causes great spiritual confusion.

How should we worship God?

Act 17:29 *Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.*

We see God is not material in his form such that a person can reproduce and make a likeness of him. On the contrary, John 4:23 says that we have to worship God in spirit (spiritually) and in truth. This is by understanding (mentally) the character, attitude, “spirit” (way of doing things), and moral principles of God, and then to impose God's will and pleasure in our lives, and practice them. It is to have a profound respect for the preaching of God's word, exposition, and teaching of the word of God. It is to be reverent in church, and to learn with joy and good will, and then have a habit of always putting into practice what you learn for your private life. The external forms are not true worship.

Why we don't use Images

by David Cox

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John 4:23 *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 to worship him.*

There are many religions today that use images in their services, ceremonies, and activities. Christians sometimes of good churches and doctrine have started using the fade of “Christian” key chains, Bible covers with images, and many other things with religious images. There are two groups of thinking on this then. First there are people and groups who say the images are useful in some way or another in their relationship with God. The other group who think lightly of the issue, and they just are not going to worry about this because they don't see images as idolatry where they bow the knee before it.