

Worship *in* Education



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Daniel 3, Rev. 14:6–12, Ps. 78:1–17, John 4:7–26, 1 Chron. 16:1–36, Mark 7:1–13.*

Memory Text: “Give to the LORD the glory due His name; bring an offering, and come before Him. Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness” (*1 Chronicles 16:29, NKJV*).

Worship is part of humanity, part of human nature, even fallen human nature. No question, we were created as beings who, out of the freedom given us by God, would worship the Lord because we love Him and know that He is worthy of worship. Such worship must have been pretty easy in a pre-Fall world, where humans had face-to-face access to God in a creation unmarred by sin, death, and destruction—a creation that we who know only a fallen world can barely imagine.

Today, of course, although the innate need to worship still exists in us, it, like everything else in this world, has been twisted and distorted by sin, which means that among other things we, as worshiping beings, can end up worshiping the wrong things, or even end up not worshiping the Lord in the way that He is supposed to be worshiped (*see, for instance, Mark 7:1–13, Jer. 7:4*).

Hence, because worship is so central to the Christian experience, Christian education must deal with the question of worship, the subject for this week's lesson.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 14.

We All Worship Something

There's something in us—something, no doubt, that was originally woven in us by God but, as with everything else, became warped by sin—that longs to worship. Obviously, in the beginning we were to worship the only One worthy of worship, our Lord and Creator. But since the Fall, all this has changed, even greatly.

But, yes, we all worship something, someone, whatever. This helps explain why all through human history, and even today, humans practice worship. In ancient Egypt, some people worshiped the pharaoh; at other times, in other lands, people worshiped statues of fish, multi-headed gods, and other supposed deities. Some people worshiped the sun, the moon, the stars.

Today, most people are too sophisticated to bow down before a statue of a frog (but, apparently, not a statue of Mary); yet, this hardly means that humans, even secular humans, don't worship something: money, power, sex, themselves, rock stars, actors, politicians. Whatever we love the most, whatever we focus most of our attention on, whatever we live for, that is what we worship. And, warned secular author David Foster Wallace, if you worship the wrong thing, it "will eat you alive."

What does the story in Daniel 3 teach us about the importance of true worship?

The three Jewish boys obviously took the second commandment (*Exod. 20:4–6*) as seriously as God had meant it to be taken. After all, it's part of the Ten Commandments, right up there with prohibitions on murder and robbery and so forth. Worship, proper worship, is so important that, in fact, it becomes central to the issues in the last days, before the second coming of Christ. Thus, Christian education needs to include the whole question of worship: what is it, how do we do it, why is it important, and whom do we worship?

Read Revelation 14:6–12. What do these texts teach us about how central the question of worship will be in the final crisis before Christ returns?

And Declare Them to Their Children

The Psalms in the Old Testament eventually came to play a role in the religious life of ancient Israel. They were recited, sung, often with musical instruments, during times of worship, especially public worship, which in the Old Testament was key to how the people worshiped in general. Israel functioned as a community, and as a community, they worshiped together.

The Psalms are basically poems, the lyrics to songs. The Hebrew word for the Psalms, *Tehillim*, means “songs of praise.” And when we sing praises to God, whatever else we are doing, we are worshiping the Lord.

Read Psalm 78:1–17. What is the essential message here, and how does it fit in with the whole question of education and worship?

There is a certain determination about the message of Psalm 78. In verse 2, Asaph mentions how we will share the “dark sayings of old.” The word “dark” does not mean “ominous” but, rather, dim or fading, as history can become when its crucial events go further and further back in time. In other translations, “dark” is referred to as “secret” (*NLV*) or “sweet old truths” (*The Message*). The point here is that whatever else the education of Israel included, it included teaching the children the stories about the Lord’s dealing with the chosen nation.

Look at Psalm 78:6–17. What were the specific lessons that they were to teach their children? What was the ultimate goal of this education?

Among the goals of education as seen in the texts is that the children would learn to trust in God and keep His commandments. How might a text such as Revelation 14:12 reflect that same idea for us today?

In Spirit and in Truth

One of the most wonderful accounts in the New Testament of how Jesus ministered to broken souls is found in the story of Jesus and the woman at the well.

Read John 4:7–26. What does Jesus say to her about worship? In fact, how did they get on the topic of worship to begin with?

Though she tried to change the subject by talking about worship, Jesus used her tactic to give us some profound truths about worship and what worship involves. Perhaps most important for our immediate purposes is what He said in John 4:24: “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (*NKJV*).

True worship of the Lord must be “in spirit,” that is, it must stem from love of God, from the experience of knowing Him personally. “The religion that comes from God is the only religion that will lead to God. In order to serve Him aright, we must be born of the divine Spirit. This will purify the heart and renew the mind, giving us a new capacity for knowing and loving God. It will give us a willing obedience to all His requirements. This is true worship. It is the fruit of the working of the Holy Spirit.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 189.

At the same time, worship must be “in truth.” We must have some correct knowledge of God, of who He is and what He requires of us. In other words, doctrine is involved, as well. (How meaningful it is, for example, to know that we worship a God who does not burn people in hell for eternity.)

Thus, we see here two elements in worship: the experience that comes from knowing and obeying God, and the objective truths revealed to us about God. Spirit without truth can lead to a shallow sentimentalism that’s built more on fickle emotion than on anything else. In contrast, truth without spirit can lead to a lifeless formalism. Hence, we need both.

How would you seek to teach someone to worship “in spirit and truth”? In what cases might someone need an emphasis more on one than on the other?

The Beauty of Holiness

Read 1 Chronicles 16:1–36. Try to picture the scene. Do you imagine it as solemn, fearful, or festive and joyous? In what way might it be a combination of both? What can we learn from this scene about worship and how we should teach and even experience worship?

The place of worship was the tabernacle, where God had dwelt with ancient Israel and where the plan of salvation had been revealed to them. Central, then, to worship and to worship education must be Jesus and the plan of salvation, all of which was foreshadowed in the tabernacle service. Whatever else God has done for us that deserves praise and worship, it all means nothing without the hope of eternal life offered to us by His sacrificial and substitutionary death on the cross.

Also, notice the “evangelistic” thrust of the passage: all the world was to learn about the God of Israel.

Look at 1 Chronicles 16:29: “Give to the LORD the glory due His name; bring an offering, and come before Him. Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness!” (NKJV). *The beauty of holiness? What might that mean?*

For starters, think about how ugly, how damaging, how degrading sin is. Also, it’s hard for us now to imagine just how evil, terrible, and degrading the worship practices of the nations around Israel were, practices that included, of all things, child sacrifices. And, no question, these things reflected what the people who practiced them were like.

In contrast, ancient Israel was to be a holy nation, separated from the evil customs around them. They were to be holy in their hearts and minds; this is what gave their worship meaning and beauty before God. Again and again the Old Testament prophets railed against people who worshiped the Lord while engaged in corruption and while their hearts were far from Him.

Idolatry in Education

Ancient Israel had been surrounded by very religious people, people so dedicated to worshiping and placating their gods that they would sacrifice even their own children to them. That's dedication, is it not?

Hence, worship, true worship of the true God, was an important part of protecting the Hebrews from getting caught up in the idolatry and false worship surrounding them. And yet, despite all the warnings, they still fell into the idolatrous practices that they had been specifically warned against.

What about us today? Why would worship of the true God, recounting all that He has done for us, be so important, as well—especially in the face of the dangers of modern idolatry?

Read Mark 7:1–13. What principle do we find in verses 7–9 that could apply today in the context of Christian education and the danger of false teaching, taken from the world, that could negatively impact the practice of our faith?

Many of the great intellectual ideas in the world today are based on a naturalistic view of reality. Many disciplines studied in school today are studied from that perspective, which often means that what is taught will be contradictory to Scripture. We can be tempted to worship ideas that have been postulated, theorized, and put into practice. We also can deify the brilliant minds of the philosophers, scientists, and mathematicians who trademarked these ideas. The problem is that often these ideas can clash with Scripture, yet because they are now currently taught and believed to be true, people try to incorporate them into Christian education. However, the only way that can be done is to compromise the faith, which often means twisting and distorting the Scriptures in order to try to make Scripture fit with current ideas.

What are some of the current popular beliefs that clash with Scripture, and how can we as a church protect ourselves from incorporating them into our own educational system?

Further Thought: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Professors of religion are not willing to closely examine themselves to see whether they are in the faith, and it is a fearful fact that many are leaning on a false hope. Some lean upon an old experience they had years ago; but when brought down to this heart-searching time, when all should have a daily experience, they have nothing to relate. They seem to think a profession of the truth will save them. When those sins which God hates are subdued, Jesus will come in and sup with you and you with him. You will then draw divine strength from Jesus, and you will grow up in him, and be able with holy triumph to say, Blessed be God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. It would be more pleasing to the Lord if lukewarm professors of religion had never named his name. They are a continual weight to those who would be faithful followers of Jesus. They are a stumbling-block to unbelievers, and evil angels exult over them, and taunt the angels of God with their crooked course. Such are a curse to the cause at home or abroad. They draw nigh to God with their lips, while their heart is far from him.”—Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2, p. 227.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 From Mark 7:1–13, we learned that the underlying condition of false worship is a heart problem. God does not regard worship with our lips if this worship is not springing forth from our hearts. Why is the gospel and the story of the death of Jesus in our behalf the most powerful way to open up hearts to truly love God?
- 2 Dwell more on the idea of worshipping God “in spirit and in truth.” Is it possible to do one and not the other, or does true worship demand both? If so, why?
- 3 Yes, our hearts need to be right in order to truly worship God, but what does that mean? Do you have to wait until you are totally connected to the Lord, with your life in perfect order, before you can worship? On the other hand, how can worship, true worship, help get your heart in the right place with God?