

What are the Effects of Worship on the Worshiper?

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from multiple sources)

Introduction:

A. Everyone will worship someone or something in his or her lifetime.

1. Acts 17:22-30; Rom. 1:19-25; 2Thes. 2:11-12; Isa. 40:18-22, 44:9-20

B. Illustration: Everyone worships someone or something. John MacArthur relates a story of an article in the Chicago Tribune. A woman from New Mexico noticed that the skillet burns on one of the tortillas she was frying resembled the face of Jesus. She showed it to her husband and neighbors who agreed the marks on the tortilla looked like a face and it bore a resemblance to their concept of what Jesus looked like.

She took the tortilla to her priest to have it blessed. She testified that the tortilla changed her life. Her husband agreed. He said that his wife had been a more peaceful, happy, submissive wife since the tortilla arrived in their home. So the priest, not accustomed to blessing tortillas and somewhat reluctant, agreed to do it. She took the tortilla home, put it in a glass case on cotton to make it look like it was floating on clouds. She built a special altar for it and opened the little shrine to visitors.

Within a few months, more than 8,000 people came to the shrine of "Jesus of the Tortilla." All of them agreed that the face in the burn marks on the tortilla was the face of Jesus. Except, that is, for one reporter. He thought it looked like former heavyweight boxing champion Leon Spinks. MacArthur comments, "It seems incredible that so many people would worship a tortilla. But such a distorted concept of worship is not really unusual in contemporary society."

Some people worship a tortilla. Some bow down to rocks, statues and animals. Others give their worship to themselves, or their families or their possessions. Some worship the church building, their favorite preacher or old traditions. The truth is, everybody gives honor, respect and adoration to someone or something.

C. Purpose: To consider the Divinely ordained functions and benefits of worship for the worshiper.

1. Most studies of worship view worship from the perspective of the scriptural way to worship, the reasons why God is to be worshiped, what must be the attitude of the worshiper, and how God was worshiped under different covenants.

2. This study will examine how the worshiper is blessed when he worships

D. Synopsis: We will examine this question from multiple perspectives

1. What contemporary mental and emotional health sciences are belatedly learning about the effect of worship on worshipers,

2. What Bible scholars have learned and written about worship and its effect on worshipers,

3. What God's word says about the effects of worship on worshipers.

I. WHAT CONTEMPORARY MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH SCIENCES HAVE LEARNED ABOUT THE EFFECT OF WORSHIP ON WORSHIPERS

A. From: "Relationships Of Religious Worship Attendance And Spirituality With Major Depression, Anxiety Disorders, And Suicidal Ideation And Attempts" (Journal of Psychiatric Research, v. 45- 2011, p. 848-854)

1. "Religious service attendance of monthly or greater reduced the odds of a suicide attempt over a ten-year period threefold."
 2. "Higher levels of religious integration allow for the regulative function of religion to exert its effect on behaviors. This suggests a protective effect for those who attend religious services and more protection with more frequent attendance" (Emil Durkeim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*).
 3. "A religious family of origin may increase the likelihood of developing a secure relationship style. A nationally representative U.S. study showed that parental religious attendance showed significant benefits for young children in cognitive, emotional, behavioral and interpersonal domains" (Bartowski et al., 2008).
 4. "Adults who report being sensitively cared for by their parents also score higher on measures of religiousness insofar as their parents were religious (Granqvist et al., 2010).
 5. "The majority of the literature in this area suggests that more religious people have less depressive symptoms" (Moreira-Almeida et al., 2006).
 6. "Aggregates of all studies show an inverse relationship between religiousness and depression" (McCullough and Larson, 1999).
 7. "Religious worship attendance was not associated with odds of developing any anxiety disorder" (Shreve-Neiger and Edelstein, 2004).
 8. "In conclusion, these results suggest that religious worship attendance may be an independent protective factor against suicide attempts. Worship attendance was not associated with incident mental disorders or suicidal ideation. Seeking spiritual comfort was a protective factor against suicidal ideation but was not associated with development of a mental disorder or suicide attempts" (Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD)
- B. Protective Associations Of Importance Of Religion And Frequency Of Service Attendance With Depression Risk, Suicidal Behaviors And Substance Use In Adolescents (*Journal of Affective Disorders*, v. 132-2011, p. 389–395)
1. "Among females, higher personal importance of religion was associated with decreased odds of depression, suicidal ideation, drinking and marijuana use, while more religious attendance was protective for substance use behaviors and suicidal ideation."
 2. "In males, religiosity was associated with decreased substance use. Religious importance had protective effects for males in marijuana use and attendance was protective for binge drinking" (Department of Community Health and Epidemiology, Faculty of Medicine, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada).
- C. Religious Social Capital: Its Measurement And Utility In The Social Determinants Of Health (*Social Science and Medicine*, v. 73-2011, p. 759-767)
1. "40% of Americans report at least weekly engagement with religious communities" (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999)
 2. "87 percent of the world's population affiliates with a religious tradition" (Gallup, 2010)

3. "Regular religious service attendance is consistently associated with lower mortality and somewhat less consistently correlated with lower levels of physical and psychological morbidity" (Hummer, Rogers, Nam, & Ellison, 1999; Joanna, Maselko, Gilman, & Buka, 2009; Maselko & Kubzansky, 2006)
4. "Frequent religious service attendance may increase access to social networks and supports, encourage better health behaviors, promote adaptive coping mechanisms, and even encourage volunteering, all of which have been independently associated with better health outcomes" (Borgonovi, 2008; Gall et al., 2005; Jonker & Greeff, 2009; Pargament, 1997).
5. "Religion overall, and religious social capital in particular, should be included in the study of social determinants of health" (Dept. of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Duke Global Health Institute, Duke University, 235 Trent Hall, Box 90519, Durham, NC; Dept. of Sociology, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL; University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing, Philadelphia, PA).

II. WHAT BIBLE SCHOLARS HAVE LEARNED AND WRITTEN ABOUT WORSHIP AND ITS EFFECT ON WORSHIPERS

- A. Worship in the New Testament is the Greek word "proskuneo" literally meaning "to kiss toward"
 1. It is used of the ancient tradition of a person kissing the hand of a superior. He would kneel to the ground, bow his head, and kiss the hand of a high or holy person.
 2. It was also used in the sense of "bowing down, or prostrating oneself." One would bow before a superior with a sense of honor, respect, awe, reverence and homage.
 3. It is also used to speak of a dog licking his master's hand, an image of trust, respect and love.
 4. Our English word "worship" comes from the old Anglo-Saxon word "weorthscipe". It refers to giving someone their worth. Toward God, it means that we ascribe to Him His worth. It means that we state and affirm His supreme value and glory.
 5. In our relationship with God, it means that we humble ourselves and give glory, honor, reverence, awe, respect and homage to God. It means we recognize His superior standing and respond accordingly.
- B. Worship is also a means of giving.
 1. We do not come to worship "to get a blessing," or for any other self-oriented purpose. We come together to give honor, respect, and reverence to the Lord God Almighty. However, this does not preclude God from building blessings and benefits for the worshiper into the worship activities.
 2. There are 87 Hebrew and Greek words that are used to describe the concepts of praise and worship. There are over 600 references to

praise and worship in the Bible. Worship literally fills the pages of Scripture from beginning to end.

- a. In the book of Genesis, Adam and Eve fell into sin because they worshiped self instead of God. Cain worshiped God incorrectly.
 - b. Revelation pulls back the curtain between earth and Heaven and gives us a glimpse of pure worship in heaven.
3. Worship is the absolute non-negotiable of the Christian life. The Christian must worship. The truly redeemed child of God cannot remain so without worship. It is as natural for a Christian to worship as it is for a person to breathe. (Alan Carr, The Sermon Notebook)
- C. "Worship is a concept that defies complete definition. Worship must be experienced in spirit and in truth before it can be fully understood.
1. Worship is the submission of all of our nature to God.
 2. To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God,
 3. To feed the mind with the truth of God,
 4. To purge the imagination by the beauty of God,
 5. To open the heart to the love of God,
 6. To devote the will to the purpose of God.
 7. And all this gathered up in adoration is the greatest of human expressions of which we are capable" (William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1942-1944).
- D. Warren Wiersbe defines worship as, "the believers' response of all that they are – mind, emotions, will and body – to all that God is and says and does."
- E. What is Worship? (Alfred Gibbs, 1950)
1. "Worship is the overflow of a grateful heart, under a sense of Divine favor. True worship does not have to be pumped and primed (John 4:19-26); it is the outpouring of a heart that is filled a sense of God's goodness, greatness and glory. When David's full heart overflowed, worship ascended to God" (Psalm 45:1).
 2. "Worship is the outpouring of a soul at rest in the presence of God. The believer is at peace with God in right relationship with Him" (Eph. 1:6).
 3. "Worship is the occupation of the heart, not with its needs, or even with its blessings, but with God Himself. We often engage in worship because of what we want to get out of it. Genuine Biblical worship is about being moved by the wonder God" (2Sam. 7:18-27).
 - a. Consider Revelation 4:11, 5:9-14. In worship before the throne of God in heaven, not a single petition is made, all that is there is pure, unadulterated worship of God
 4. "Worship is the up springing of a heart that has known the Father as the Giver of all good gifts, the Son as Savior, and the Holy Spirit as the Divine Communicator. While anyone in the world, even an unbeliever, can recognize that God exists, not everyone will worship. The lost man can understand the reality of God, but he cannot appreciate the truths about God revealed by the Spirit of God" (1Cor. 2:12-14).

III. WHAT SCRIPTURE SAYS ABOUT EFFECTS OF WORSHIP ON WORSHIPERS

- A. What does it mean to worship the Lord in spirit and truth? - John 4:20-24
1. Worship of God is not restricted to a single geographical location nor necessarily regulated by the temporary provisions of OT law.
 2. With the coming of Christ, the separation between Jew and Gentile was no longer relevant, nor was the temple central to worship.
 3. With the coming of Christ, all of God's children gained equal access to God through Him. Worship became a matter of serving God from the heart, not through complex ritual, and directed by truth rather than pomp and ceremony.
 4. Deut. 6:4 - Moses instructs the Israelites in how they are to love God:
 5. Our worship of God is directed and driven by our love for Him; as we love, so we worship - Mark 12:30.
- B. True worship must be "in spirit," that is, engaging the whole heart. Unless there is real passion for God, there is no worship in spirit.
1. At the same time, worship must be "in truth," that is, properly informed. Unless we have knowledge of God and His will, there is no worship in truth. Both are required for God-reverencing worship.
 2. Spirit without truth leads to a shallow, overly-emotional experience that could be compared to a high. As soon as the emotion is cooled, so does the reverence for God.
 3. Truth without spirit can result in a dry, passionless encounter that can easily lead to a form of tedious legalism.
 4. This blending of spirit and truth in worship is best summed up by Jonathan Edwards, 18th century American theologian: "I should think myself in the way of my duty to raise the emotions of my hearers as high as possibly I can, provided that they are affected with nothing but truth." Edwards recognized that truth and only truth can properly influence the emotions in a way that brings honor to God. The truth of God, being of infinite value, is worthy of infinite passion.
- C. Immediate effects of worship
1. Worshiping God puts us into and maintains the proper relationship with Him, in the sense that we are acknowledging that He is God and deserves worship, and acknowledging His worthiness by worshiping in the manner He wants. This allows us to have a closer and more fulfilling relationship with God - Psalm 122:1, 84:1-4
 2. Worshiping God fulfills us and makes us complete and pleased. We enjoy giving people we love praise and reward for goodness. How much more so with God Whom we love above all and acknowledge as worthy of all praise? - Isa. 25:1; Psalm 98:1-4
 3. Public worship is how some learn about God- Col. 3:16; 1Cor. 14:24-25
- D. God is not vain - Acts 17:24-25
1. Some people object that God doesn't just accept worship, He demands it. They picture God as an egotistical or even insecure tyrant who insists that everyone tell Him how great He is. This is not accurate, for God's command is, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all

your soul and with all your strength" (Deut. 6:5), not "Tell me five times a day how wonderful I am."

2. Worship is part of God's instruction to love Him. When we love God and realize how awesome He is, worship and praise naturally follow.
 3. God's instruction to worship Him is only a demand in the sense that God's other moral laws are demands. God doesn't command us not to murder because He is a dictator, but because it's morally right (and therefore ultimately in our best interests). Similarly, God tells us to worship him because it's the proper way for us to relate to him and because it's in our best interests to do so.
 4. If God were vain, one would think He would want pictures and statues of Himself everywhere, yet He commanded that no one make images of Him. Instead, he told the Israelites to keep copies of his commands everywhere - Deut. 6:6-9.
- E. Every aspect of worship of God has a Divinely ordained purpose and benefit for people who worship in spirit and in truth. Illustration: Obedience to the Gospel that brings one into true worship condition before the Lord.
1. Hearing brings enlightenment through the knowledge of God, dispelling the darkness of ignorance. This knowledge has the power to develop responsive faith within the careful listener. So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). The word of God brightly lights up the way out of sin and into righteousness. David said in praise to God: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105)
 2. Faith provides the motivation necessary to make the changes that will make one a Christian. Strong belief moves him to careful obedience to the Gospel, for without faith, he will not effectively obey. Faith also provides purpose and meaning to life. Faith gives one an understanding of who he is, why he is here, and where he is going when life is over. All important questions are answered by a well-informed faith in God.
 3. Repentance is a change in the believer's moral purpose in life. The believer must also repent of his sins and regret a life lived without God's unchanging word. Repentance becomes the means by which man turns away from sin, changes his direction in life, and embraces right living. In turning from sin, he develops a better character... a character that will enable him to walk faithfully as a Christian upon completing his obedience to the Gospel.
 4. When one confesses Jesus Christ as the Son of God, he professes the maturity of his faith. Confessing Jesus as the son of God demonstrates courage and heralds one's desire to become a Christian.
 5. When one is baptized, he becomes spiritually clean; free from all of his sins. He enters into the family of God as one of the Father's cherished children. He has access to all the blessings, rights, and privileges of that family. It is evident that the plan of salvation not only saves one from sin and makes him a Christian, but it also changes his life and the way he lives it.

6. Hearing the word enlightens him (2Tim. 3:15). Believing the word motivates him (Hebrews 10:39). Repenting changes his direction in life (2 Cor. 7:10). Confessing Jesus as the Christ declares his faith and desire to become a Christian (Rom. 10:10). Being baptized changes his life, changes his living, and gives him new life (Rom. 6:6-8).

IV. GOD ORDAINED THAT WORSHIP PROFOUNDLY AFFECT THE WORSHIPER

A. Singing - Job 38:4, 7

1. It opens people's hearts to hear the Word of God. After we have been worshipping God in song, the preacher's job is made easier. Robert Morris writes: "As Judah was told to 'break up the fallow ground' (Jer. 4:3) so that the seed will grow; after singing praises in worship, I simply to get up and just drop the seed in prepared soil. Half of the gospel is preached before the sermon even starts."
2. Praising God connotes gratitude & respect to Him as an act of worship
 - a. He is praised by singing (Judges 5:3) & speaking (Psalm 145:21)
 - b. No one is exempt from praising God (Psalm 67:5)
 - c. We can also praise Him more and more (Psalm 71:14) and forever (Psalm 52:9).
 - d. We must praise Him unashamedly, unconcerned about what others think of our ability to sing - 2Sam. 6:14-16, 21-22
3. Praising God is full of benefit.
 - a. It enables us to enter into the presence of God - Psalm 100:4
 - b. It enables us to perceive His Glory - Psalm 95:1-2; Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19; James 5:13; Psalm 147:1, 13:6

B. Prayer - James 5:16-18

1. Brings one closer to God. Prayer enhances your relationship with Him so that He is reflected in every other part of your life. We become close by revealing parts of ourselves.
2. Brings Divine help. God is everywhere, but He wants us to acknowledge our needs in asking for help.
3. Keeps our selfishness in check. When we add others to our prayers, we find ourselves being less selfish in the other areas of our lives.
4. We gain forgiveness. When we pray, we open ourselves up to forgiveness. There are no perfect people. There are only those who strive to be the best they can be. Through prayer, God forgives our trespasses and restores us to fellowship (1John 1:6-10).
5. Gives us strength. It helps to know someone is working in our best interests. God gives us direction and wisdom that supplies strength. He provides help through others who give us strength - James 1:5-6
6. Improves our attitude. Humility is a huge part of faith, and prayer allows us to be humbled daily. It puts our problems into perspective relative to God's greater plan and reminds us of our dependency on Him.
7. Offers us hope. Placing our problems at God's throne opens us up to trusting Him. When we trust God, we have hope that things will turn out to His glory and our spiritual wellbeing.

8. Reduces stress. When we lay our troubles at God's feet, we can feel the weight of the world come off of our shoulders. When we trust in God to hear our prayers, our stress levels go down.
 9. Can give a better understanding of ourselves. When we talk to God, we can hear the way we talk about ourselves. It is through prayer that we can see the person God sees.
- C. Preaching - The scriptures abound with texts that address the benefits and blessings derived from hearing the word of God presented in a structured, persuasive, and passionate manner.
1. Displays the word of God to humankind - Titus 1:3; 1Cor. 1:21
 2. Reveals the Kingdom to draw men to God - Mark 2:2; Luke 8:1
 3. Magnifies the Savior of men - Acts 17:2-4
 4. Warns the lost - 2Cor. 5:10-11
 5. Encourages the saved - 1Thes. 3:2
 6. Transforms lives - 1Cor. 15:1-2
- D. Communion - It is in the Lord's Supper that the Christian experiences great personal benefit in worship. Of all of the Divinely ordained worship activities, communion appears to be designed to benefit the worshiper the most.
1. Fellowship with the Lord - Matt. 26:29
 2. Fellowship with each other - 1Cor. 11:20, 33
 3. Periodic self-examination - 1Cor. 11:28-29
 4. Declaration of faith in the second coming - 1Cor. 11:26
 5. Remembrance of the price of salvation - Matt. 26:26-28
- E. Giving - There are no scheduled sacrifices and measured tithes in the covenant of Christ. Each one gives as he is prospered - 1Cor. 16:1-2
1. Periodic opportunity to test our commitment, honesty, and generosity
2Cor. 8:8, 9:7
 2. Participation in the work of the church - 2Cor. 9:10-12; 1Cor. 9:14
 3. Reciprocal fellowship with preachers - Phil. 4:16-17; Rom. 15:26-27
 4. Fellowship with saints in need - 2Cor. 9:8-9
 5. Periodic opportunity to remember God's blessings - 2Cor. 8:9

Conclusion:

- A. "Worship has been misunderstood as something that arises from a feeling which 'comes upon you,' but it is vital that we understand that it is rooted in a conscious act of the will, to serve and obey the Lord Jesus Christ" (Graham Kendrick). - John 4:24
- B. "No man gives anything acceptable to God until he has first given himself in love and sacrifice" (A.W. Tozer). - Heb. 13:15; 2Cor. 8:3-5
- C. "Worship changes the worshiper into the image of the One worshiped" (Jack Hayford). - 2Cor. 3:18
- D. "Worship is first and foremost for His benefit, not ours, though it is marvelous to discover that in giving Him pleasure, we ourselves enter into what can become our richest and most wholesome experience in life" (A Heart For Worship, Lamar Boschman, p. 58).