

Worship
The Heart of Worship (Part 7)
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We are looking at our Lord's teaching in John 4 and at His conversation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. We've been looking at this passage over the last several weeks because in these verses Jesus teaches us how to worship. He opens up for us the heart of worship. In John 4 beginning in verse 20 and running through verse 26, Jesus identifies for us here four inviolable laws of true worship.

We've learned the first three together. Let me remind you of them. First of all, true worship is not external, but must rise from the heart. Notice verse 20,

“Our fathers” [the woman says,] “worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.”

He's trying to tell her that true worship ultimately is not about the externals, it's about what rises from the heart. It's not about where you are. It's about where your heart is.

The second truth or law that we've learned from this passage is in verse 22, and it's that true worship is not merely emotional, but must result from knowledge. In verse 22 our Lord tells this woman,

“You” [that is you Samaritans] “worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.” [Worship without knowledge is not true worship at all.]

Third great law that we learn from this text is that true worship is not intuitive but must be directed by God's truth. Verse 23, “But an hour is coming, and now is,” [that is Jesus is saying with My arrival] “the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.”

We must worship God always in accord with what He has directed in His Word. We must worship “in truth”. We are taking that little phrase our Lord used, “in spirit and truth” apart for the purpose of dissecting its meaning. In practice it can’t be separated, let me remind you that “in spirit and truth” is a package. You can’t truly worship in spirit without worshiping in truth. You can’t truly worship in truth without worshiping in spirit. But we’re taking them apart just to gain an understanding of the meaning that our Lord has here. And “in truth” gave us, out of verse 23, our third great principle, true worship is not intuitive, but must be directed by God’s truth.

Now today we want to look at the fourth inviolable law of worship. I think I said four laws earlier, that’s not true, there should be five laws. Today, we’ll look at the fourth and Lord willing we’ll look at the fifth in the weeks to come. Now, the fourth great law that we learned from this text is that true worship is not superficial but must be in spirit. True worship is not superficial but must be in spirit. Look at verse 24, our Lord tells this woman God is spirit, and those who worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and truth. He uses that phrase again, but obviously the emphasis in this verse is on “in spirit” because He begins by identifying that reality about God. Now as we try to understand this fourth law of worship today, I want us, as we seek to understand it, to ask and answer several questions.

The first question that we need to ask and to answer together is: what does it mean to worship God in spirit. What does it mean to worship in spirit? Well notice that Jesus’ directive here to worship in spirit is predicated on a giant theological assertion that occurs at the beginning of this verse. Jesus says to this woman, “God is spirit.” Now the Greek construction of that little phrase, specifically the absence of the Greek definite article, shows that Jesus is using the word spirit here, not to refer to the Holy Spirit, but rather to refer to the nature or essence of God’s being. God is not a spirit, in the sense as if God were a ghost, instead, Jesus is saying that it is God’s essential nature, God is in His essential nature spirit. Now the implications of that are huge. That means that God is divine and not human because to be human by definition is to be body and soul. It means that God is invisible as opposed to visible. The fact that God is spirit means that God is unknowable unless He chooses to reveal Himself. It also means that God is a spiritual being versus a physical being.

Now after making this sweeping statement about the nature of God, Jesus immediately applies it for this woman. By the way, let me just stop here and say that this very clearly illustrates for us the importance of doctrine. In this brief encounter at the well, Jesus thought it was important to teach this Samaritan woman profound doctrine about the being of God, about His nature. Why?

Because it had direct bearing on how she thought about God and how she carried out her worship. Doctrine matters, it has huge implications in what we do, and how we live, and how we think.

Now here in verse 24, this is Jesus' point: because God is an immaterial being, because God is spirit, He is not merely interested in our physical worship. Because He is an immaterial being by nature He is unimpressed with our physical demonstrations of worship. But He wants us to worship Him in spirit. Now there are some who believe that the reference here is to the Holy Spirit, and it is true that we worship God through the Holy Spirit. Philippians 3:3 says that we who are the truly justified ones worship in the spirit of God. That's true. The Holy Spirit enables and energizes the worship of every believer without exception. But in John 4, Jesus is not referring to the Holy Spirit. We can see that from the construction. There are a number of clear reasons here in the context, perhaps the most obvious is the logical connection. Jesus is saying, God is by nature spirit so, we must worship with the spiritual part of our nature.

So, what Jesus is saying here is that each one of us must worship in our own spirit, versus merely our bodies. Scripture often contrasts our bodies and our spirits, and that's what Jesus is doing here. For example, in Colossians 2:5, Paul says, "... I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit..."

He's talking about that immaterial part of our being, that's the point that Jesus is making. By the way, notice verse 24 again, in our English text, you see the word "must", that translates a Greek word which literally translated says this, "it is necessary", that's how it's translated many times in the New Testament, "it is necessary". It is necessary for us to worship God, Jesus says, in spirit that is with our spirits, with the immaterial part of our being. To be true worship, it must flow from the immaterial part of you. Now this is not a new requirement, in fact, God has always demanded this. Turn back to Deuteronomy 6. You remember this great command: the shema the Jewish people still recite to this day, every day. Deuteronomy 6:4,

"Here, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!" [That great cry of monotheism,] "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

We're told that we must love God not merely or we must serve God not merely with our bodies by being in the right place at the right time and doing the right things, but our hearts and our souls have to be engaged and they have to be engaged with all our strength, with all our might.

And in fact, not only is this how God has always required it but this is how the faithful has always worshiped. If I were to take the time I have a number of passages in my notes that I don't even have time to turn to, but let me just site a couple of them for you. In First Samuel chapter 2 we meet Hannah, that Godly woman, the mother of Samuel, she says my heart exalts in the Lord; my heart, who I am. Turn to Psalm 84, I'll show you a couple of Psalm passages that make this same point. Psalm 84:2, "My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh" [there it is, he's saying my whole being, the immaterial part of me and my body] "sing for joy to the living God."

It's to be all of us, worshiping God and that's what the psalmist says that he does. Turn over to Psalm 103, David puts it very clearly in Psalm 103:1,

Bless the LORD, O my soul" [David's calling on his own soul, his whole being, the emphasis probably being on the immaterial part of him.] "Bless the LORD, O my soul and all that is within me bless His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul.

[He ends the Psalm where he began it in verse 22,] "Bless the LORD, all you works of His, in all places of His dominion; bless the LORD, O my soul!"

Turn over to Psalm 108, this is a fascinating text. Psalm 108:1, "My heart is steadfast, O God; I will sing," [watch this] "I will sing praises, even with my soul." [True worship and singing doesn't start at your mouth, it starts in the immaterial part of your being.]

Jesus reiterated the same principle in Mark 12:29, when He repeated that great command from Deuteronomy 6:5, and called it the great commandment. This is how we are to worship God. It must flow from the immaterial part of our being. So, folks, this is what it means to worship in spirit. It means that you worship God in your own spirit that is with your heart, that's what it means.

Now there's a second question that we need to answer this morning, and that is: what does it require of us to worship in spirit? What does it require of us to worship in spirit?

Well, in a word, worshiping in spirit requires "participation". That's the key word, "participation". And it requires the complete participation of your entire being. You see this Samaritan woman already understood that her body was to be engaged in worship. She already

got that. She knew that to worship God, based on their acceptance of the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch. She knew that she had to be in the right place. She had to bow at the right times. She had to say the right prayers. She had to make the right sacrifices. Now Jesus tells her that true worship goes beyond that, that her soul must be engaged also.

Listen to how James Montgomery Boice put it before his death, he says,

“true worship occurs only when that part of man, his spirit, which is akin to the divine nature, for God is spirit, actually meets with God and finds itself praising Him for His love, wisdom, beauty, truth, holiness, compassion, mercy, grace, power, and all His other attributes.”

It's when the immaterial part of you responds to the God who is spirit. Superficial mechanical worship is unacceptable to God. He wants our worship to be the expression of our entire being.

Now I want to fill this out a little bit, because I think sometimes we need to go a little deeper to make sure we've got our arms around it. We can further define what our participation, the participation that's required of us, with four adjectives. Let me just give you these four adjectives that help us understand what's required to worship God in spirit. We need to participate, but how?

Adjective number one: our participation must be “internal”. It must be internal. So much of what professes to be worship today is mere formalism or externalism; it emphasizes performance rather than the heart. Going through the motions of worship is a cheap substitute for true biblical worship. And God won't take it, He won't have it. In fact, turn to Isaiah, the prophet Isaiah has a passage that is one of the clearest and most direct to this whole issue. Isaiah 58, Isaiah 58:3, God has told the prophet to declare to the nation of Israel, that they're wrong; verse, the end of verse two says that,

“they delight in the nearness of God.” [They had this appearance of true worship and they don't understand, verse 3,] “Why have we fasted and God, You don't pay any attention? Why have we humbled ourselves and You didn't notice?” [We'd gone without food, and You haven't paid any attention.] “Behold on the day of your fast, you find your desire,” [you pursue what you want] “and you drive hard all your workers.” [You don't even care for your workers.] “Behold,” [watch verse 4,] “you fast for contention and strife and to strike with a wicked

fist. You do not fast (normally) like you do today to make your voice heard on high.”

You see what the prophet is saying, he’s saying you’re doing all the right things, but your heart isn’t engaged. You normally don’t do it to make your voice heard on high, instead it’s all about the external. True worship must engage the heart. Folks, if your mind wanders, it’s not worship. This morning with what we’ve already done in worship as we have sung, if your mind wasn’t engaged, if it wasn’t internal, then it wasn’t worship. If as we study the word of God together your mind isn’t engaged, it’s not going on internally, then you’re not worshipping. If when we prayed your own heart hasn’t been crying out to God internally, then you aren’t worshipping, your body’s here, but you’re not worshipping. It has to be internal, in spirit, means that it must be internal. It must be your immaterial part.

A second adjective we could use is our participation must also be “authentic”. Now, I know that word is being overused today, but it’s a good word, authentic. Listen to Isaiah again, in Isaiah 29:13, listen to the Lord’s indictment of His people, “... the Lord said, “Because this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists in tradition learned *by rote*,”

You see, sincere, authentic worship isn’t about tradition learned by rote. It’s not about just going through the motions, and it’s not about who’s watching. Turn to Matthew 6, in Matthew 6 we see that our worship is to be authentic and sincere versus hypocritical, versus just for show. Matthew 6:1,

“Beware” [Jesus says] “of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.” [And then he applies the principle, verse 2,] “So, when you give to the poor, don’t sound a trumpet as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets so that they may be honored by men.” [Verse 3,] “When you give to the poor, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.” [Verse 5,] “When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners” [Why, in order that, here’s their purpose,] “so that they may be seen by men. Truly I tell you that they have their reward in full.”

Listen, true worship in spirit means, not only that something is going on inside, but that what is going on inside is sincere, it's authentic. Stephen Charnoff writes in his great work *The Existence and Attributes of God*,

How can we imagine God can delight in the mere service of the body any more than we can delight and converse with a carcass? Without the heart it is no worship, it is a stage play and acting a part without being that person really which is acted by us, a hypocrite in the notion of the word is a stage player. We may be truly said to worship God, but we lack perfection. But we cannot be said to worship Him if we lack sincerity. A statue upon a tomb with eyes and hands lifted up offers as good and true a service as that.

He's absolutely right, if there's no sincerity, if it's not genuine in your heart, if it's not the sincere expression of your heart then it's not worship. God could get just as good of worship from a statue standing in a cemetery. Now let's think about this for a moment. How often do we allow our worship to disintegrate into appearance? Let me just ask you, have you ever been more expressive in worship because of who's watching you? Have you ever read your Bible, and I don't want a show of hands here. Have you ever read your Bible so that your spouse or your friend sees that you are reading your Bible? Have you ever prayed to impress the people that you are praying with? True worship never happens when we are concerned about anybody but God. It must be authentic and sincere, not hypocritical.

The third adjective we could use to help fill this out as our participation must be "passionate". Passionate. True worship is never half-hearted. It is enthusiastic; it is fervent; it is earnest; it is animated; it is white hot; it is whole hearted. In fact, God rebukes people for half-hearted dispassionate worship. Turn back to Malachi; you see this in his prophecy, the last book in the Old Testament. Malachi writes to rebuke a number of sins among the people and he begins in chapter 1:6 with the priests. And God says,

"A son honors *his* father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is my honor?" [You're not treating Me with respect, God says.] ... "O priests who despise My name" [and they respond, verse 6,] "Well what do You mean, we're not respecting You, we're despising Your name?" [Well here's how, verse 7,] "*You* are presenting defiled food upon My altar. But you say, ["Wait a minute, what do You mean we're defiled] "How have we defiled You?" [Verse 8,] "... when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil?"

You remember there were restrictions on the kind of animal that was to be offered in sacrifice, well these people were going through the motions, they were offering sacrifices okay, but they didn't want to give their best, the ones without defect because those could be sold for a higher price. So instead, they just offered God the lame and the blind and those that had problems. Its okay, God won't care. That's half-hearted worship. They were going through the motions, but they weren't passionate about offering to God the best that they could. You see it again down in verse 13, "You also say, 'My, how tiresome it is!' And you disdainfully sniff at it," says the Lord of hosts, "and you bring what was taken by robbery and what is lame or sick; so you bring the offering! Should I receive that from your hand?" says the LORD."

Half-hearted worship, the prophet says does not show respect for God. That's the bottom line, half-hearted worship doesn't really show respect for God. You're not taking God seriously. You must, if it's going to be true worship, you must be passionate in worship.

You say well, what does that mean; well it means different things for different people. Your passionate may be different than my passionate. But let me just ask you a sort of question to clarify it. What earthly thing excites and animates you the most? Just think about that for a moment. Is it music; is it football; is it baseball; is it golf. Lord help you if it's golf. Whatever it is, whatever it is that you would say this is the thing that excites or animates me the most. Think about how passionate you are about that thing. When you're watching your favorite team win or when you're listening to your favorite song, or when you're on the golf course. Whatever it is, whatever it is earthly thing that gives you great passion that you're most passionate about, think about what that looks like. If you are any less engaged when you worship God, then it is not true worship. I'm not saying you have to do the same things. You don't have to jump on the bleachers like you or in the pews like you do on the bleachers when you go to a football game, but I'm saying if your being is less engaged, then it's not true worship. You're more passionate about something else than you are about God. And God won't take that lightly, just as He didn't in Malachi's time.

The final adjective that worship in spirit requires is "active", active. As I've reminded us on many occasions, we live in a spectator culture. I think I've mentioned before someone has defined football as a hundred thousand people desperately in need of exercise watching 22 people desperately in need of rest. The average American spends six hours every day doing nothing but watching TV, six hours every day practicing to be a better spectator. And he does that six days a week, and then he shows up on Sunday, sits in the pew and immediately assumes

that he is here yet again to be a spectator. That mind set is dead wrong; it's the opposite of true worship. I love this quote by Soren Kierkegaard, listen carefully.

“People have the idea that the preacher is an actor on a stage and that they are the critics blaming or praising him. What they don't know is that they are the actors on the stage, he is merely the prompter standing in the wings reminding them of their lines.”

Folks that's my job, I'm not the actor and you the audience. You are the actors, and God is the audience. I'm merely here to help you remember your lines.

In Matthew 6, Jesus puts it very bluntly, He says we are to give in such a way not that other people see, but so that the Father sees. We are to pray in such a way not to care who else sees us or who else hears us, but so that the Father sees. You see God is always the audience, in true worship you and I are always active, we're always the actors, and God is always the audience. And if you approach worship any differently than that, even as you sit and hear the word taught right now, then it's not worship. True worship is never passive; it is always active.

Now, let's answer a third question. What does it look like to worship in spirit?

We've looked together at what does it mean. We've looked at what does it require to worship in spirit. Thirdly, what does it look like to worship in spirit? Now, I really want us to apply this truth to our worship. And it looks essentially the same whether we're talking about individual worship, our family worship, or the worship of the entire church together. Look at those four adjectives I just gave you again; “internal, authentic, passionate, and active.” If you and I are going to worship in spirit, then all four of those adjectives have to describe every element or component of our worship. Remember the elements of worship: we sing the Bible, we pray the Bible, we read the Bible, we teach the Bible, or hear it taught. And then when we gather together as the church, we give our offerings to see the true biblical worship supported and extended, and we see the Bible acted out in the ordinances, the Lord's Table and baptism. So, let's just work our way through a couple of those just as examples.

Let's think for a moment about singing, singing is an act of worship, we sing the bible. That is, we sing truth rooted in the truth of Scripture. We sing it to God. If your thing if your singing rather, is going to be in spirit, then it will be internal, it will be authentic, it will be passionate, and it will be active. That means that more is happening when you're singing than just moving

your lips. It means your heart will be engaged and participating, and you will be sincere and authentic, instead of hypocritical. That means you really will be singing from your heart to the Lord. And you certainly won't stand there not singing at all. Worship is active. It's participating. You say, well, you know I can't sing. Well neither can Sanjaya, and look where it got him. Listen, when you get to heaven God's not going to say, you know you really shouldn't have sung you have such a terrible voice you should have just stayed quiet. No, we are to sing to the Lord and to worship God actively, internally, passionately means that we sing. And by the way when we sing passionately, it means that when we sing, we don't sing just a few decibels above lip syncing. We sing out. We're passionate. We sing out with our hearts. Not so that our neighbor hears us, not so that we appear more spiritual, but so that God is pleased that we're singing with our whole being unto Him. This is what it means to worship in spirit.

We can use the same adjectives to describe our worship in prayer. Prayer that's offered in spirit is "internal", "it's authentic", "it's passionate", and "it's active". If you're praying in spirit, you're praying in your heart really with the person who leads. As I lead in prayer in the services, you're really praying with me in your heart. You're talking to God with me in your heart. I'm not the actor. You're not listening to me, and going well that was a great prayer this morning, or you know that was a dog. You're not in, you're not sitting there judging my prayers, you're supposed to be praying with me. If you're praying with others, and you're the one praying, you don't pray so they'll hear you, you don't pray so they'll be impressed with how glib you are. If you're praying with others, it's not to be heard by them. Also if you're praying in spirit, you're passionate about it. You're actively participating in your heart.

Now folks, those same four adjectives can be applied to all the legitimate expressions of worship and to every venue, whether you're worshipping privately individually, or whether as a family, or whether you're worshipping corporately. True worship in spirit means those things. That's what it looks like.

Now that brings us to a fourth question. What about, and this one is related, it comes up, what about physical displays in worship.

I'm treading now where angels fear to tread. Since our whole being is to be engaged, what about some of the common and popular physical displays. Are they permitted here at Countryside Bible Church? Well the key thing to remember is that because God has determined what is acceptable to Him in worship, we must always ask does scripture prescribe it as a legitimate expression of worship. That means such displays as fainting, or being slain in the spirit, or

yelling or barking or a number of other things that go on are not prescribed by the Word. So, they will not be allowed here period end of story. But what about the three popular physical displays that are mentioned in Scripture, namely; dancing, clapping, and lifting up the hands. Let me briefly comment on each of those.

What about dancing before the LORD. Well the Old Testament does mention people dancing before the LORD on a couple of occasions. Apparently with the LORD's approval, in Exodus 15:20, Miriam, the sister of Moses and the women of Israel danced before the LORD. In 2 Samuel 6:14, David, you remember the most famous incident, danced before the Lord. And in Psalm 30:11, David alludes to it by saying God has turned His spirit of mourning into dancing. But only in two Old Testament passages does dancing seem to be prescribed or commanded. Turn to Psalm 149, Psalm 149:2,

Let Israel be glad in his Maker; let the sons of Zion rejoice in their King, Let them praise His name with dancing; let them sing praises to Him with timbrel and lyre." [And again in Psalm 150:4,] "Praise Him with timbrel and dancing;"

Now a couple of considerations on this issue: first of all you have to understand that this was part of the culture of Israel to dance at joyous occasions. You see it by the way in the Old Testament on other occasions that had nothing to do with the worship of God. This was part of their culture. So, the application for us may be an attitude rather than an activity; just as we're told for example to rip our clothes and sit in sackcloth and ashes. The point is not that we are to physically do those things, those things are not part of our culture, but rather we are to have the spirit that accompanies ripping our clothes and sitting in sackcloth and ashes, it may be that that's the application of this idea of dancing.

A second consideration is that the religious dance of the Israelites was much different than the spirit dancing typically done today in some churches. It was a very active twirling and leaping by members of the same sex. It had a lot more in common with the Cossack dance than with ballet. It was definitely not characterized by sensuous movements.

But that brings me to the third issue: the key thing to remember is that dancing is not prescribed for corporate worship, nor is it ever practiced as part of the mandated corporate worship either of Israel or of the church of the New Testament. Because of that our elders have concluded that it is not something that will be a part of our corporate worship. Now it's hard for me to argue that it's not a legitimate expression of worship. It is done on a number of occasions. So, if you want

to dance to the Lord, then dance to your hearts content, just do it at home; and I say that genuinely. If you want to here, feel free to rock on your heels or to sway a little back and forth like I do, that's fine, but that's as close as we're going to get to dance in the corporate worship of this church.

That's issue number one. Now let's go to issue number two: what about clapping? Again, clapping was part of the Old Testament worship. For example,, it was part of the culture as well, by the way, that's not new with us. In 2 Kings 11:12, when little Joash is anointed King, the people clap. But to God, we see it in passages like Psalm 47, Psalm 47:1 where we read, "O clap your hands, all peoples; shout to God with the voice of joy."

Clapping is really an expression of joy, it's an affirmation. Now, in terms of our church and the corporate worship together again the elders have discussed this issue, and we all agree that it's okay for you to clap, its okay for you not to clap. But when we do clap, it should never be primarily about rewarding the musician for a job well done. But rather it should be an affirmation of the message of the song or the goodness of God in providing music for us all to enjoy. In other words, the focus of our clapping should be God and not primarily the human people. Of course, there's always an element of that. I think it's hard for us to divorce the two, but primarily it ought to be about God. That's what should be in our heart; it's a kind of Amen, if you will. It's an affirmation. Let me also say practically that clapping in the church should fit the occasion. If the choir has just ended a quiet meditative piece, then it doesn't really fit to clap. While I'm on this topic, can I tell you something that really bugs me, if we're going to clap, let's clap. Let's not give the polite golf clap. (clap, clap, clap - Good job, well done.)

Now, one final common physical display that we need to talk about and in some ways the most controversial: what about lifting hands in worship. In Scripture we often see men lifting up their hands in worship. On a few occasions, they do it in the praise of God. For example, Nehemiah 8:6 says,

"Ezra blessed the great God and all the people answered Amen and Amen, while lifting up their hands." [In Psalm 63:4 we read,] "I will bless You as long as I live, I will lift up my hands in Your name." [Psalm 134:2,] "Lift up your hands to the sanctuary and bless the LORD."

So, there are occasions, three of them in the Old Testament when lifting the hands was associated with the praise of God. More commonly, more frequently the hands are lifted in prayer. For

example, in 1 Kings 8:22, we read of Solomon spreading out his hands toward heaven to pray. In 2 Chronicles 6:13, recording the same event, we're told that Solomon knelt on his knees and spread out his hands toward heaven to pray. In Ezra 9:5, Ezra does the same thing, the psalmist talks about this thing, in Psalm 28:2, in Psalm 88:9, 141:2, and 143:6. When you come to the New Testament, you see it in the writings of Paul, in 1 Timothy 2:8, Paul writes, "I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissention."

Now, obviously, the focus there is on the fact that they're to pray in holiness, but you still have the lifting up of the hands. Now you might ask yourself, why would we or anyone why did they in the Old Testament times and even in the New Testament lift up their hands while in praise or prayer? Well I think we get a hint of that in Lamentations 3:41, We read this, "We lift up our heart and hands toward God in heaven." It is a physical picture, if you will, of the spiritual reality that we are addressing God. It is a reminder that we are addressing God in our hearts and with our voices.

Now, you might be tempted to say well this was a cultural thing. Well, it wasn't merely a cultural thing. Philip Schaff in his excellent *History of the Christian Church* writes, "A prayer, even in the second century the usual posture in prayer was standing with outstretched arms in oriental or Asian fashion." And if you've ever peeked while I'm praying, I won't ask for a show of hands, I do this all the time, not because I plan to do it, it's just natural for me, I talk with my hands particularly when I'm passionate about something. So, when I'm talking to God, my hands are moving. Lifting the hands is a way of drawing toward God as the object of our worship.

Now, let's talk about this practically in our church. The Scripture allows the lifting of the hands in prayer and in praise including in the corporate worship. So will this church, while it's not something that we intend to promote, neither is it something that we will forbid. Our elders are agreed, we don't want anyone in this church to feel compelled to lift their hands, but neither do we want anyone in this church to feel that they cannot lift their hands if they choose to in worship. So, in prayer, or in the singing, if you want to lift your hands, you can do so. But there are two crucial caveats.

Number 1, you must never do it with the motive to draw attention to yourself or to make yourself seem or appear to be more spiritual.

And secondly you must never do it in a way that distracts others in their worship. You and I have both been in services where that is true. We will not permit that here. This isn't your private worship session, you are around other people, and you must keep them in mind and not do anything in such a way that is distracting to them.

Now I know that there are a few of you sitting there very nervous. You're afraid that I have just taken the first step on the slippery slope to this church becoming charismatic. You don't need to be afraid, if anything I and the elders are more biblically set against charismatic doctrine and practice than we have ever been. This has nothing to do with this church becoming charismatic. This has to do with being honest with the Scripture as we always try to do.

Now one final question that we need to ask, and then we'll be done: very quickly, how can we prepare to worship in spirit? How can we prepare to worship internally, authentically, passionately, and actively?

Number 1, God must change your heart. God must change you if you're going to worship in spirit, God has to first change your heart. First Corinthians 12:3, "No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit." That doesn't mean you can't mouth the words. What it means is you cannot express them as the sincere expression of worship without the presence of the Holy Spirit. If you're going to worship in spirit, you have to have a different heart, and only God can do that, and He'll do that today if you're willing to turn from your sin and embrace Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. He'll make you a worshiper.

Number 2, as a believer you must confess your sin. If you're going to prepare to worship in spirit you have to confess your sin. Psalm 66:18 says, "If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear." So, in the worship of prayer the Lord won't hear, and there's every reason to believe that in the rest of the expressions of worship He won't hear either. If I have not confessed my sin to Him; you want to worship God, then start as a believer by confessing your sin.

Number 3, restore any broken relationships. If you want to worship in spirit, you've got to start here. Matthew 5:23, Jesus says,

"... if you are presenting your offering at the altar," [that's an act of worship,]
"and you there remember that your brother has something against you" [there's a
problem between you and a brother,] "leave your offering there before the altar

and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.”

Don't worship God while there are things between you and other brothers and sisters in Christ. In fact, this is especially true of marriage. Peter says in 1 Peter 3:7, ... husbands ... live with *your wives* in an understanding way, ... and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.”

Don't for a moment think you're really worshiping God here this morning if there are issues between you and other people. You have to deal with that before God will accept your worship.

And number 4 and finally, “choose to worship”. In the end worship is a response to God, but it is also an “act of the will”. I won't take time to turn there, but I love the verse in Luke 10, where Jesus is interacting with Martha and Mary, you remember. And Jesus says this in verse 42,

“Martha ... *only* one thing is necessary,” [and in the context, He's talking about worship,] “for Mary has chosen” [and the Greek word is a very strong word for selecting] “Mary has ... [selected] the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”

You have to decide. Am I really going to do this am I going to worship God like this, in spirit and in truth. You better, because it's what God saved you for. Jesus said, “God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit.”

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we thank You for Your Son, we thank You for giving Him to us. We thank You for the clarity of His teaching, and Father we thank You that You have then given us, through the Apostles that He chose, those words for us to learn from and for us to consider. Thank You for the wonderful study we've had in this great chapter even today.

Father, help us to truly be engaged. Help our worship to be in spirit, with our entire being; body and soul together bringing You praise. Father, I pray that You would help us to learn these lessons. Lord I pray you'd forgive us for half-hearted worship; for insincere; for hypocritical worship; for worship that's only external, for worship that's passive, that causes us to sit as if we

were spectators. Father, I pray, that instead, You would engage our hearts. May we honor You with the worship we bring.

In the name of Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.