

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 1/11/04 Brad Brandt

"Worship: First Things First" **

Main Idea: As we scan the Bible we discover four vital truths that make it clear that the worship of God is to be the most important pursuit of our lives.

I. We were created to worship.

A. When we do, there's paradise (Genesis 1-2).

B. When we don't, there's chaos (Genesis 3).

II. We are redeemed to worship.

A. By God's design, Israel was a worshipping community (Leviticus).

1. The tabernacle put Yahweh at the center of life.

2. The holy days put Yahweh at the center of the calendar.

B. By God's design, the church is a worshipping community.

1. We are God's temple (1 Cor 3:16).

2. We worship God when we give Him what He deserves (Heb 13:15-16).

C. The goal of redemption is a worshipping community (Zech 14:16-17; Rev 15:4).

III. We are prone to worship wrongly.

A. Satan tries to take God's worship (Isaiah 14:12-14; Gen 3:1; Matt 4:8-10).

B. If Satan can't take it, he tries to tarnish God's worship.

1. Some people worship the wrong god.

2. Some people worship the true God in the wrong way (Jonah 1:9; Matt 15:9; Col 2:23).

IV. We must choose to worship rightly.

A. Grace makes it possible (Phil 3:3).

B. Grace makes it essential (John 4:23-24).

1. We need to worship Christ corporately every week (Heb 10:25).

2. We need to worship Christ personally every day (Rom 12:1).

3. We need to worship Christ acceptably every moment (Heb 12:28).

Resolve: I will be a true worshiper of Jesus Christ in 2004.

This morning we're going to begin the new year with a new series, *"Get a Grip: Seven Values of a Strong Christian."* It's a series unlike those I typically preach—expositional journeys through books of the Bible. Though expositional, this will be a topical series, an exposition of what the Bible teaches about a vital subject.

Let me explain. We have a mission, one given to us by the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to make disciples of Christ locally and worldwide through the teaching of the Word of God.

But what does a true disciple look like? Or to put it another way, what are seeking to produce as a church? About a year ago, driving back from Harrisburg, PA I spent hours pondering that question. What is it that we want to be and produce in this task of disciple-making? I prayerfully came up with an answer. In time I bounced my answer off of other godly men I respect, including our church leadership team. And now, I'd like to share it with you.

Strong disciples are people who hold to seven essential values. Likewise, strong churches are churches where its people have a handle on these seven values. As I drove from Harrisburg that day I thought about my hand and how it illustrates these seven values in visual form. That's why I've entitled the series, "Get a Grip." To have a strong grip you must utilize all five fingers, connected to the wrist, and in submission to the orders from the head. So too for a member of the Body of Christ.

Let me give you the whole illustration right now. In the seven weeks ahead we'll explore each of these values one by one.

Value #1—A disciple is a person who is committed to worship.

This is illustrated by the first finger, for worship must be first place in the value set.

Value #2—A disciple is one who is committed to edification.

The middle finger (which is the longest) represents edification, the need for growth.

Value #3—A disciple is one who is committed to love.

The ring finger illustrates love. By this all men will know you are my disciples...

Value #4—A disciple is one who is committed to service.

The pinky finger, the smallest finger, represents the need to serve in the little things.

Value #5—A disciple is one who is committed to evangelism.

A thumb's up signal signifies good news which is what we have to share with people.

Value #6—A disciple is one who is committed to fellowship.

A hand will not function if it's not connected to the wrist and the rest of the body.

Value #7—A disciple is one who is committed to obedience.

A hand is designed to follow the orders from the head. So with the Christian.

There may be more than seven, but for sure you must value these seven essentials if you want to be a strong Christian. They are a package deal—you can't pick and choose any more than you can shake someone's hand with only three fingers and have a strong grip. It takes five fingers connected to the wrist in submission to the head to have a strong grip. Likewise, you must value all seven essentials if you want to get a grip on the kind of life God intends for you. You must value worship, edification, love, service, evangelism, fellowship, and obedience.

Where do we begin? We must put first things first with value #1, *worship*.

Our text of study this morning will be the Bible, the *whole* Bible! I want to take you from Genesis to Revelation to show you what God has to say about the subject of worship. In so doing we'll discover four vital truths that make it clear that the worship of God must be the most important pursuit of our lives. It's more important than any other pursuit—than family, job, anything. It's value #1. Why? The answer goes back to truth #1.

I. We were created to worship.

You well remember the first words of the Bible. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." If Genesis 1 makes anything clear it's this. This is *God's* world. He made it. He made everything in it—the light on day one, the sky on day two, the dry ground and vegetation on day three, and so on. He made it all.

And don't miss this. He made it all *for Himself*. Romans 11:36 states, "For from Him, and through Him, and to

Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever." He created man. He put man in the garden and gave him his work, his family, and everything else. He also gave man a special day each week to remind him that there's more to life than punching the clock and playing with your family, as important as those actions are.

Yes, we were created to worship God. Worship is so important that the word itself ("worship") appears 158 times in the Bible (NIV). God made us in His image. He formed us with the capacity to live in intimate relationship with Him and to reflect Him. And there are two things the first three chapters of the Bible make clear...

A. When we do, there's paradise (Genesis 1-2). When Adam gave God the place He deserves in his life, when Adam lived with a vertical focus, life was beautiful beyond our comprehension. That's because by God's design, when we value His worship, we experience the blessings of paradise. However...

B. When we don't, there's chaos (Genesis 3). You know the story. In Genesis 3:1 the serpent came. Eve heard a rival voice to God. When we worship God we listen to His voice and live for His glory, but Eve entertained another ambition. Following the tempter, she questioned God's Word, disobeyed God's will, and convinced her husband to follow suit. Oh, they still believed in God. They just marginalized Him.

What happened as a result? Look at Genesis 3:8-9, "Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, 'Where are you?'" What happened? They *hid* from God.

We were created to live in close communion with God, but sin built a wall between us. Sin caused Adam and Eve to run and hide from God. Paradise is gone. Because sin entered the world, there's no longer communion with God for the natural man but *chaos*.

Thankfully, the story doesn't end at Genesis 3:8. In the second half of Genesis 3 God took the initiative to make it possible for sinful man to once again be a worshiper of Him. He provided Adam and Eve with animal skins to remove their shame and gave them a promise that one day He would reclaim His fallen world (3:15).

II. We are redeemed to worship.

That's the message of Genesis 4 through Revelation 22. The Bible is the story of redemption. It tells what God has done, is doing, and will do to form a people for His glory. In Genesis 12 He chose a man named Abram. From that man He formed a nation, Israel, and through that nation He brought hope to the world through the sending of His Son.

Please don't miss this. The purpose of redemption is worship. We see it in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament.

A. By God's design, Israel was a worshipping community (Leviticus).

Why did God redeem Israel from bondage in Egypt? He revealed why in Exodus 8:1, "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Go to Pharaoh and say to him, 'This is what the LORD says: Let my people go, *so that they may worship me.*'" That's why God rescued Israel, to form a nation that would worship Him.

Even Pharaoh caught on to this. After the ten plagues we read this in Exodus 12:31, "During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, 'Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, *worship the LORD* as you have requested.'"

The Lord intended for Israel to be a worshipping community. At Mount Sinai He said this:

Exodus 20:3 "You shall have no other gods before me." And this...

Exodus 20:4-6 "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or *worship* them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God...." And this...

Exodus 34:14 "Do not *worship* any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God."

God desires and deserves worship from His creatures. The problem is, sinful creatures don't want to worship Him. Our first thought is self, not Him. But the Lord knows that, so in His grace He gave Israel a couple of reminders to help them worship Him. We discover these two object lessons—the tabernacle and the holy days—in the books of Exodus and Leviticus.

To many this section of the Bible is boring, but that's because they don't understand its purpose. Here God is teaching His people how to worship. We can't come to God on our terms, for He is holy. We need Him to show us how. That's what He did for Israel.

1. Object Lesson #1: The tabernacle put Yahweh at the center of life. Did you realize that God devoted seven chapters in the Bible—that's 243 verses—to describe the details of the tabernacle, yet only 31 verses to depict the creation of the world? Why so much information about a tent? This was no ordinary tent. The tabernacle, by its very design and location, emphasized the priority of worship.

There were no seats in the tabernacle. The Israelites didn't go there for entertainment. They went there to worship God—and they did so by the means God prescribed, through blood sacrifice.

And when the Hebrews traveled through the Sinai desert en route to the Promised Land, just where was the tabernacle? Right smack in the middle of the Israelite camp—God doesn't want His people to marginalize Him. He gave specific instructions for how to set up camp. The twelve tribes were arranged in a rectangular shape, three to the north, three to the west, three to the south, and three to the east, with the tabernacle right in the middle.

The tabernacle was the place where God met His people. The Lord used the very structure of the camp to show His own that He was to be at the center of their lives.

But once the Hebrews reached the Promised Land they didn't live in tents around the tabernacle any longer. God gave them something else to reinforce worship.

2. Object Lesson #2: The holy days put Yahweh at the center of the calendar. Every seventh day the people stopped to worship. It wasn't optional, indeed, to violate this command was punishable by death. In addition, three times a year there were major holy days for the Jews (Exod 23:14ff.) and all the Jews traveled to the tabernacle (and later the temple) to offer sacrifices. Again, the Jews didn't attend if they *felt* like it. Participation in these worship services was mandatory.

Not that God wanted mere ceremony. By giving His people the tabernacle and holy days He was helping them do what people struggle to do, even redeemed people, put the Lord at the center of their lives.

Sadly, some of the Jews misunderstood these object lessons. In fact, some essentially worshipped the object lessons themselves instead of the Giver of the object lessons. Case in point—the Pharisees. They cheapened worship to mere ceremony.

But not all Jews did this. Some, by God's grace, became true worshippers of Yahweh. The Spirit gave His people psalms as expressions of worship, private and corporate. David, for instance, wrote these words in 1 Chronicles 16:23-29 (also in Psalm 96) and gave them to his people:

"Sing to the LORD, all the earth; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and joy in his dwelling place. Ascribe to the LORD, O families of nations, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength, ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name. Bring an offering and come before him; *worship* the LORD in the splendor of his holiness."

Please don't miss this. Why does God save people? It's so they will *worship* Him. That was true for Israel in the Old Testament. It's no different in the New Testament.

B. By God's design, the church is a worshipping community. Ponder that. We are a *community*, not just a bunch of unconnected saints, but a family. And a *worshipping* community. Worship is at the center of who we are.

Just think of the language the New Testament uses to describe us. Who are we?

1. *We are God's temple (1 Cor 3:16)*. To the local church in Corinth Paul wrote (1 Corinthians 3:16), "Don't you know that you yourselves are *God's temple* and that God's Spirit lives in you?" Unlike Israel, we don't go to the temple. *We are* God's temple. We don't have to go somewhere to meet with God. God has come to live in us. Our worship isn't limited to three trips a year to Jerusalem. For the church, the sphere of worship is the whole of life. *We*, as a collective body of believers, are God's temple.

When the Jews went to the temple, they brought offerings to God. Worship involves giving. It's no different for us today.

2. *We worship God when we give Him what He deserves (Heb 13:15-16)*. We haven't defined worship yet, but it's time. The word "worship" comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *weorthscipe* which carries the idea of worthiness. To worship the Lord is to ascribe His worth and affirm His supreme value.

The New Testament uses a couple of illustrative Greek words for worship. One is *proskuneo* which literally means "to kiss toward," "to kiss the hand," or "to bow down." It speaks of humble adoration. A second word is *latreuo* which signifies rendering honor or paying homage.

Note that at the heart of worship is *giving*. When we worship God we give Him something. When a person says, "I don't like our church's worship services. I don't get anything out of them," he's revealing a severe misunderstanding. When you worship God your motive isn't to *get*, but to *give*.

You say, "What can I give God since He already owns everything? What does He want from me?" We need not wonder for the Lord tells us in His Word what He desires and deserves. The Bible says we are to give God:

--Our praise in song (Heb 13:15; Psalm 150)

--Our needs in prayer and petition (Phil 4:6)

--Our tithes and offerings (Malachi 2:8; 2 Cor 9:7)

--Our careful attention when His Word is preached (Rev 2:7, 11, etc).

--Our bodies (1 Cor 6:20)

--Our good works (Heb 13:16)

The writer of Hebrews sums it up (Heb 13:15-16): "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

But there's a problem we must face. By nature, sinners don't want to give—either to God or other people. We want to *get*. Our desire to *get* is so consuming that we'll take even a good activity like worship and twist it into a self-satisfying end—which is why thousands of people are attending church today, not to give God their praise, prayers, tithes, nor attention to His Word, but to "get a blessing." And it's also why they may not even go back next week, because they didn't get a big enough blessing or felt the blessing was big enough to last for a couple of weeks.

Friends, when we're truly worshipping God we're not thinking about ourselves. We're seeking to give Him what He deserves. And realize this...

C. The goal of redemption is a worshipping community (Zech 14:16-17; Rev 15:4). Worship was at the heart of what God desired of Israel in the past, as for the church in the present. Yet know this. It will be no different in eternity future! Worship is the goal of God's redemption.

Zechariah spoke of future worship in Zechariah 14:16-17, "Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year *to worship the King*, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. If any of the peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to *worship the King*, the LORD Almighty, they will have no rain."

Did you catch that? Zechariah said the day would come when Israel's enemies would worship the Lord, too! That began to happen at Pentecost, for in this age God is saving people from every nation, language, and tribe—and saved people worship Him. Indeed, that's what they will do forever and ever.

In the final book of the Bible God gave John a revelation of the coming new heaven and earth. He described what he saw in Revelation 21:22-27:

"I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life."

Vital truth #1—we were created to worship. And #2—we were redeemed to worship.

III. We are prone to worship wrongly.

The fact is, everybody worships, even an atheist—he worships himself. Because we were created in the image of God, it's our nature to worship something. Yet because of the Fall, it's our nature to worship wrongly.

To complicate matters, we have an adversary. You must know two things about him.

A. Satan tries to take God's worship (Isaiah 14:12-14; Gen 3:1; Matt 4:8-10).

He's a thief. Ironically, the Bible teaches that Satan used to be a beautiful angel, once enjoying the very presence of God. What led to his downfall? Worship did. He tried to usurp God's worship.

Isaiah 14:12-14 explains, "How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have

been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.'

Satan wanted what God alone deserves. He hasn't changed. Do you remember the third temptation he threw at Jesus in the wilderness? It's in Matthew 4:8-10:

"Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.'" Satan loves to steal God's worship. We must respond to him as did our Savior. Verse 10—"Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

Satan doesn't go down without a fight. It's his nature to take God's worship, but...

B. If Satan can't take it, he tries to tarnish God's worship. In other words if he can't steal God's worship, he does all he can to pervert it. And people fall to his strategy in two ways.

1. *Some people worship the wrong god.* Baal. Buddha. Allah. These are not other names for the true God. These are rival gods to the Creator, crafted by Satan and worshipped by millions. There's another way God's worship is tarnished.

2. *Some people worship the true God in the wrong way (Jonah 1:9; Matt 15:9;*

Col 2:23).

Some people seem to think, "God doesn't care *how* you worship Him, as long as you do it. It's the heart that matters." Wrong. Years ago the Lord warned the Israelites not to incorporate the ceremonies of the Canaanites into their worship, saying in Deuteronomy 12:4, "You must not worship the LORD your God in *their way*."

For worship to be acceptable we must worship the right God and do it in the right way. There are plenty of people who claim to worship the God of the Bible but fail because they worship Him the wrong way. What are some of the wrong ways?

One is to base our worship on human tradition rather than the Word of God. That's what Jesus said the Jewish leaders did in Matthew 15:9, "They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men." Many churchgoers think their worship is acceptable simply because they have the right hymnbook (or conversely, because they use choruses rather than outdated hymns) or some other manmade tradition.

Another wrong way to worship God is to say things with your lips that don't match your life. Take Jonah, for example. Right before the sailors threw him into the sea he said this in Jonah 1:9-10, "'I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land [note he had good theology].' This terrified them and they asked, 'What have you done?' (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.)" Some people can recite the Lord's Prayer perfectly on Sunday, sing the hymns beautifully, and may even teach a Bible lesson with theology as good as Paul himself. But if they tolerate sinful living the other six days, God's not impressed with their worship.

Another wrong way to worship the right God is to ignore His temple, the church. Roger, a member of your Sunday School class, hasn't been to church in months so you pay him a visit. "We've missed you, Roger," you say. "I'm concerned about your spiritual condition."

"Well, thanks for the concern," Roger says. "But don't worry. So-and-so hurt my feelings and I've decided to

stay away for awhile. I may not be in church but I'm doing just fine with the Lord. I worship Him on my own every week."

What's Roger doing? He may be worshipping the right God, but he's doing it in the wrong way. And He may feel fine with the Lord, but the Lord doesn't reciprocate.

Brothers and sisters, we have no right to redefine the rules for worship. God determines how we approach Him, not us. And in His Word God makes it clear that to be right with Him we cannot tolerate wrong attitudes towards His people and neglect participation in the local church. If you doubt that, ponder 1 John 4:20, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen."

It's a fact of life, a battle we'll fight all our lives. We are prone to worship wrongly, to either worship the wrong god or to worship the right God in the wrong way. So...

IV. We must choose to worship rightly.

How can sinners like us ever become genuine worshipers of the Living God? There's only one way...

A. Grace makes it possible (Phil 3:3). Listen to Philippians 3:3, "For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh." Paul says that a true Christian is someone with two characteristics:

- 1) He is a worshipper with worship generated by the Holy Spirit.
- 2) He is a person who glories in Christ Jesus, not his flesh.

In other words, he realizes that he is saved by grace, not his works. He knows that grace and grace alone makes worship possible. But grace takes us a step further...

B. Grace makes it essential (John 4:23-24). Jesus announced in John 4:23-24, "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

Since grace makes worship essential, I'd like to offer practical challenges.

1. We need to worship Christ corporately every week (Heb 10:25). Hebrews 10:25 says plainly, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

Answer this. Why is Sunday called the *Lord's Day*? Granted, every day comes from the Lord and is to be lived for the Lord, but especially the *Lord's Day*. In His wisdom God put into our routine one day out of seven designed to renew our vertical focus. It's not primarily a family day, although family interaction should take place. It's certainly not intended to be a "day for me" filled with self-seeking activities. It's the *Lord's Day*.

Beloved, we need the Lord's Day and God certainly deserves it. We need a day in which we gather with other believers to give God our praise, our prayers, our offerings, and our attention to His Word. If you are neglecting the Lord's Day you are harming your spiritual health, and worse, you are robbing from God what He deserves.

So determine to worship Christ corporately every week. A second challenge...

2. We need to worship Christ personally every day (Rom 12:1). As Romans 12:1 exhorts, "Therefore, I urge

you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your *spiritual act of worship*." Yes, we can worship on Sunday—and should. But we can also worship the Lord the other six days—and should—for we are living sacrifices. At work, at school, around the dinner table, look for ways to give God honor. Thirdly...

3. *We need to worship Christ acceptably every moment (Heb 12:28)*. Hebrews 12:28 says, "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe."

Every week, worship Christ corporately. Every day, worship Christ personally. Every moment, worship Christ acceptably. It's what our God deserves. It's what we need if we are to be a strong Christian. Therefore...

Resolve: I will be a true worshiper of Jesus Christ in 2004.

Let's be people who value worship!