

# **Basic Christian Living**



# BASIC CHRISTIAN LIVING

*A Survey Course on Practical Christianity*

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## THE NATURE OF WORSHIP

Worship and praise are not the same thing. Worship is the foundation for praise, just as it is the foundation for everything else. God has created man to worship Him, and to worship Him rightly.

So what is worship? The biblical answer is that it is glad service. When you offer yourself to God, body and soul, that is worship. The main word in the Old Testament (*aboda*) and in the New (*latreia*) both originally refer to the *service* of slaves or hired servants. So a worship *service* is where you offer yourself—body, soul, and spirit—to God for His work that He has assigned for you.

1. Look up Isaiah 6:1–8, and read through it carefully. If worship is presenting yourself to God for service, and not simply being awestruck at His glory, where does the worship in this passage occur? How is the idea of worship communicated?

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2. Now look up Deuteronomy 6:13 and compare it to Matthew 4:10. The command is to worship the Lord your God and serve Him only. Satan wanted Christ's worship (i.e., service). In these passages, when we make ourselves available to God for His service, what instruments of mine am I presenting to Him?

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3. Now in Romans 12:1–2, worship is the offering up of the physical body as a living sacrifice. What will the consequence of such worship be on the attitudes of the ones offering it (v. 3)?

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4. Romans 6:19 presents another angle on worship. What is offered there, and as what?

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5. Having done all this, praise is certainly appropriate. According to Psalm 33:1, for whom is praise appropriate?

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6. Undergirded by faithful worship, when is praise appropriate? According to Psalm 34:1 and Hebrews 13:15, when should we praise the Lord?

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7. What should we conclude about when we should be worshipping the Lord?

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Many of the problems confronting modern Christians is that they diligently try to do the right thing . . . in the wrong categories. They try guitar fingering on a mandolin; they try chess rules on a backgammon board; they apply the rules of French grammar to English. And for us to draw attention to such mistakes is *not* to object to any of these things in particular—chess, guitar, backgammon, whatever. But this is the mistake we make whenever we try to “make a difference” and our activity does not proceed *directly* from a vision of the Almighty Lord, high and lifted up.

<sup>1</sup>The LORD reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof. <sup>2</sup>Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne. <sup>3</sup>A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about. <sup>4</sup>His lightnings enlightened the world: the earth saw, and trembled. <sup>5</sup>The hills melted like wax at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth. <sup>6</sup>The heavens declare his righteousness, and all the people see his glory. <sup>7</sup>Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols: worship him, all ye gods. <sup>8</sup>Zion heard, and was glad; and the daughters of Judah rejoiced because of thy judgments, O LORD. <sup>9</sup>For thou, LORD, art high above all the



earth: thou art exalted far above all gods. <sup>10</sup>Ye that love the LORD, hate evil: he preserveth the souls of his saints; he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked. <sup>11</sup>Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. <sup>12</sup>Rejoice in the LORD, ye righteous; and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.” (Ps. 97:1–12)

8. God *reigns*, and what is called to rejoice (v. 1)?

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9. His holiness is not what we might assume—His righteousness and judgment are compared to what (v. 2)?

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10. A fire precedes Him, and so what happens to His enemies (v. 3)?

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11. Lightning flashes, and the whole created order sees it, and what is the response (v. 4)?

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12. In the presence of God, hills and mountains melt in what way (v. 5)?

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13. The heavens preach, and what does everyone see as a result (v. 6)?

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14. A curse is pronounced—confounded be all false worshipers. And what are all the gods summoned to do (v. 7)?

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15. When this is proclaimed, Zion hears and is glad. What do the daughters of Judah do (v. 8)?

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16. Why do we rejoice (v. 9)?

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17. This transcendent sense of true worship has potent ethical ramifications—what are those who love the Lord called to hate (v. 10)?

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18. In this setting, there are those who return the hatred. What does God do (v. 10)?

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19. Light is sown for the righteous. Who receives gladness (v. 11)?

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20. We are summoned by God to therefore rejoice. What are we to do as we remember His holiness (v. 12)?

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Holiness is not manageable (v. 2). Holiness does not come in a shrink-wrapped box. Holiness is not *marketable*. Holiness is not tame. Holiness is not sweetsy-nice. Holiness is not represented by kitschy figurines. Holiness is not smarmy. Holiness is not unctuous. Holiness is not domesticated. But if you worship a god who is housebroken to all your specifications, what is the result? Depression, and a regular need for sedatives—better living through chemistry.

Holiness is wild. Holiness is three tornadoes in a row. Holiness is a series of black thunderheads coming in off the bay. Holiness is impolite. Holiness is darkness to make a sinful man tremble. Holiness beckons us to that darkness, where we do not meet ghouls and ghosts, but rather the righteousness of God. Holiness is a consuming fire. Holiness melts the world. And when we fear and worship a God like this, what is the result? Gladness of heart.

Worship a god who does nothing but kittens and pussy willows and you will end in despair. Worship the God of the jagged edge, the God whose holiness *cannot* be made palatable for the middle-class American consumer, and the result is deep *gladness*. Do you hear that? Gladness, *not* pomposity. And, thank God, such gladness does not make us parade about with cheeks puffed slighted out, or speak with lots of rotund vowels, or strut with a sanctimonious air. Gladness, laughter, joy—set *these* before you. This is deep Christian faith, and not what so many are marketing today in the name of Jesus. The tragedy is that in the name of relevance the current expression of the faith today is superficial *all the way down*.

Those who love and worship the Lord are called to hate evil. So this is why an ethical application of the vision of the holy is most necessary. If we bypass this vision of who God actually is, the necessary result will be a prissy moralism, and not the robust morality of the

Christian faith. The distance between moralism and true morality is vast, and the thing that creates this distance is *knowledge of the holy*. Those who content themselves with petty rules spend all their time fussing about with hemlines, curfews, and scruples about alcohol. But those who see this folly and go off in their own little libertine direction are no better. The former act as though their moralism is grounded on the dictates of a gremlin-like god who lives in their attic, but his word is *law*. The latter say that this is stupid, and aspire to become the gremlin themselves. There are two parts: love the Lord, hate evil.

According to this psalm, how should we define right worship? The answer is that *right worship* occurs when the congregation of God approaches Him, *sees Him as He is*, and responds rightly, as He has commanded—in joy and glad submission. Such worship necessitates turning away from all idols (v. 7), and turning to the holy God who *cannot* be manipulated. And in this psalm alone, what does right worship do? What effect does it have? What are the results? The earth rejoices (v. 1). All the islands are glad (v. 1). His enemies are consumed with the fire that goes before Him (v. 3). The earth is illuminated by His lightning, and trembles (v. 4). In the presence of the Lord (and in worship we *are* in the presence of the Lord), the hills melt (v. 5). The heavens preach, and the people see His glory (v. 6). Idolaters are flummoxed, confounded (v. 7). The universal call to worship is even issued to the idols (v. 7). Zion hears and is *glad*, and the daughters of Judah *rejoice* (v. 8). The name of God is exalted above every name (v. 9). The saints of God learn to hate evil, and God preserves them from those who persecute them (v. 10). Light and gladness are sown in our hearts (v. 11). His righteous people rejoice, and are grateful when they remember His holiness (v. 12).

21. Describe in a few words the difference between praise and worship.

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22. Describe the relation between a perception of God's holiness and the right kind of worship.

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Those who *serve* graven images are confounded (v. 7). Those who worship false gods cannot be anything but confounded. Those who worship the true God falsely are missing the scriptural call as well. But those who worship rightly will inherit the earth.

## FORGIVENESS OF SIN

The Lord Jesus was born into a *sinful* world. His advent was not designed as an inspirational moment to crown all the others, but rather He was sent as a *Savior*. He came to bring forgiveness, and consequently if there is anything His followers should understand, receive, and practice, it is forgiveness.

1. Look up Matthew 1:19–21, a passage which records the dream that Joseph received. Why was Jesus named *Jesus*? What was the point?

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2. Now look up Hebrews 10:16–18. There are two main characteristics of the new covenant that are mentioned there. What are they?

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Now after Joseph discovered that Mary was pregnant (and he knew that *he* wasn't the father), the only reasonable conclusion for him to draw was that Mary had been unfaithful to him (Mt. 1:19). But he did not want to humiliate her, so he resolved to divorce her quietly. While he was deciding what to do, an angel appeared to him in a dream, called him a son of David, and told him that Mary had conceived as result of the work of the Holy Spirit (v. 20). The angel told him, further, that the baby would be a boy and that Joseph was to name Him *Jesus*. The reason for the name is that He would save His people from their sins (v. 21). The name *Jesus* is the New Testament equivalent of *Joshua*, which means that “God is salvation,” a meaning that Matthew confirms, adding the important detail that the salvation is from sin.

Jeremiah had looked forward to the coming of the new covenant—a time when Israel and Judah would be transformed into faithful covenant-keepers. In the eighth chapter of Hebrews, the entire passage from Jeremiah is quoted. In Hebrews 10, it is quoted again in abridged form,

emphasizing the key details of the new covenant. These key terms were the internalization of the law (Heb. 10:16), and the forgiveness of sins (v. 16). And where there is remission, there is no further need for sin offerings (v. 17).

3. So again, what does the name *Jesus* mean?

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4. What does the new covenant promise us?

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God offers sinful human beings deep forgiveness. The Lord Jesus did not come, live a perfect life, die on the cross, and come back from the dead in order to dab around the edges of our wound. Our complicity in the sin of Adam, and our continuing screwed-up-ness required a great remedy, which could not be had apart from the work of a great Savior.

5. So look up Matthew 9:12. Who did Jesus come for?

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6. If Jesus came for messed-up people, then can you disqualify yourself from His grace by being all messed up?

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But remember that Jesus is saving us from our sins, and not merely from the consequences of our sins—from sin itself and not just from condemnation for sin. And one of the central sins He is saving us from is the sin of the double standard—wanting to receive forgiveness on easy terms, and wanting to extend it with the heart of a stickler for justice. We want to borrow easily, and lend with difficulty. We want our fingers open to receive, and have our fist clenched for giving.

But Jesus has given us fair warning about how we do not receive forgiveness on our terms. Not at all. In the Lord's Prayer, we are taught to say this to *God*—"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Mt. 6:12). "Dear God, please harbor toward me all the thoughts I harbor toward others." Do the words stick in the throat? "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart" (Mt. 18:21–35). Forgiving others is *not optional*.

7. Think of the person you have the *most* trouble loving. Are you willing to ask God to think of you the way you think of them?

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8. Look up Acts 5:31. Besides repentance to Israel, what does Jesus give?

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9. Look up Acts 13:38. Why is Jesus preached?

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10. Look up Acts 26:18. What is the end result of being transferred from the power of Satan to God?

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11. In Ephesians 1:7 and Colossians 1:14, what is the result of redemption through the blood of Christ?

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Having been forgiven for everything, we must have hearts that are completely and entirely full of forgiveness for those who have wronged us. But the world is a messy place—what does this *look* like? We usually have a better understanding of forgiveness when receiving it, because we *need* the forgiveness we receive to be all-encompassing. We want to receive forgiveness dispensed from a fire hose, and we want to ladle it out with a teaspoon. But Jesus came to save us from our parsimonious selves. Forgiveness means treating the other person as though they did absolutely no wrong—even though you know that they did do something wrong. Forgiveness presupposes real sin. You don't have to kid yourself to be forgiving—in fact, it is crucial not to. “I'll forgive him because he didn't really mean it” is whitewash, not forgiveness.

This forgiveness means that your heart attitude is that of treating them as though they had done no wrong. Forgiveness doesn't erase certain consequences of sin. For example, a young girl can be forgiven for sleeping with her boyfriend—but she still has the baby.

What are the mechanics of forgiveness? First, love and forgiveness cover a multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4:8). This means that forgiveness (for a certain kind of sin) *can* be extended without the other person's cooperation. But this "cover" has to be a cleansing carpet, not a lumpy one.

12. What sorts of sins might this kind of forgiveness need to cover?

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Second, love and forgiveness do not attempt to read the heart (Lk. 17:3–5). We are told to forgive, up to seven times daily, which actually means 490 times, and this applies even though all of us would have our suspicions about the third or fourth time. Forgiveness is a *transaction*, like the sale of a mule. When you forgive someone, it is because they asked you to promise that you would not hold their sin against them, and you extended that promise.

13. What are they asking you to promise, and what are you promising?

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Third, love and forgiveness confront when necessary (Mt. 18:15–19). This must only be pursued for the sake of the other person, not your own sake. It is quite striking that Jesus tells the parable of the unmerciful servant immediately after the famous "Matthew 18" instruction. But both these teachings are in Matthew 18. The unmerciful servant is the one sinned against, and so he would have been the one following the Matthew 18 court process.

But conservative believers are far more *comfortable* with accusation than they ought to be. Run a thought experiment concerning two hundred Christian law students who have just passed the bar. One hundred of them are going to be defense attorneys, and one hundred will be prosecutors. Which group will most likely be asked to justify their choice of a profession, and asked how they reconcile it with their Christian faith?