

Worship *in* Education



SABBATH AFTERNOON

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

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

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

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

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

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

We All Worship Something

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

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

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

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

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

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

And Declare Them to Their Children

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

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

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

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

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

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

In Spirit and in Truth

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Beauty of Holiness

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

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

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

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

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

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

Idolatry in Education

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Discussion Questions:

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

Praying for Work in France

By ANDREW McCHESENEY

Abdelkader Henni had no interest in Christianity, and he was surprised when a chaplain spoke to him about Jesus at a school where he participated in after-school activities with other young people in France.

“You come often,” the chaplain said. “Why don’t you become a Christian?”

Abdelkader, who had lived most of his life in France after his parents immigrated from Algeria, stopped going to the after-school activities. But he wasn’t sure what to do. He had finished high school and couldn’t find a job.

A short time later, he met a Seventh-day Adventist from Algeria. Abdelkader’s heart was touched as he listened to the Adventist’s story. He realized that an Algerian could become a Christian, and he began to read about Christianity. Around that time, he ran into an old high school friend. Crystal had been unhappy in high school, but now a joy surrounded her. Abdelkader wondered what had happened, and as if reading his thoughts, Crystal told him.

“I met Someone, and that Person totally transformed my life,” she said.

“Who did you meet?” Abdelkader asked.

“I met Jesus Christ,” she said.

Abdelkader wondered whether Jesus could transform his life. He accompanied Crystal to a church prayer meeting that evening. When someone asked whether he had any prayer requests, he said, “I need a job.”

The next morning, his phone rang.

“You are Abdelkader?” an unfamiliar voice asked.

“Yes,” he said.

“Are you looking for a job?” she asked.

Later that morning, the caller interviewed Abdelkader in her car as she drove him to his new job. He was astonished. He had applied for the job weeks earlier but only received it after praying. He believed Jesus could transform his life.

Back at home, he prayed, “I want to know which church to choose.”

Three days later he heard a man speaking about the seventh-day Sabbath on the radio. The man read Isaiah 56:1, 2, which says in part, “Blessed is the man who . . . keeps from defiling the Sabbath” (*NKJV*). Abdelkader remembered the Adventist from Algeria and how Adventists went to church on the seventh-day Sabbath. He joined the Adventist Church.



Today Abdelkader, whose name means “servant of the Almighty God,” is a 51-year-old Adventist pastor working with non-Christians in France.

“Every day I praise God for the work that He has given me to do,” he said.

Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help people in France and around the world learn about Jesus.

Part I: Overview

Worship is an important topic, and the lesson makes a provocative point that we were created, or hardwired, for worship. But because sin has distorted our hardwiring, our expressions of worship can now be misdirected, or misguided. It is possible to worship the wrong thing—or worship the right thing in the wrong way. Worshiping objects other than God is a problem, but not as subtle of a problem as directing worship to God in a manner that He rejects (*Mark 7:1–13, Jer. 7:4*).

The subject of worship really gets interesting when it transcends the issues of drums and video projectors and instead involves life or death. Revelation 14, along with its Old Testament echo in Daniel 3, shows how high the stakes can be over worship. This angle is relevant not only for end-time study and preparation, but it also can inspire resolve for those Christians currently experiencing persecution.

Knowing that we have a fundamental need to worship, that this dimension of the human spirit has been affected by sin, and that worship can be a life-or-death matter should convince us that it needs to be included in Adventist education. Though worship can (and should) be extremely personal, it is not immune to critique. Jesus asserted that God *must* be worshiped “in spirit and truth” (*John 4:24*). To this end, this lesson is devoted.

Part II: Commentary

Scripture

All Christians believe God should be worshiped; and there the consensus ends. How to worship, when to worship, where to worship, how often we worship, and so forth are some of the issues up for reflection and study. One of the two extremes to avoid would be to conclude that there is a single uniform way to worship God that encompasses every minute detail. Culture; circumstances; availability (for example, does every believer have access to a church building?); and, to some degree, the character and personality of the worshiper will affect what worship looks like. The other extreme, of course, is to think worship is simply a matter of personal preference and that God will exhaustively accept all forms of worship. The question we must ask is: What does the Bible tell us about acceptable forms of worship? How do we even know that God has preferences in regard to worship? Simple: He told us.

A Woman Brings Up Worship

When Jesus spoke to the woman at the well, the conversation progressed to the uncomfortable topic of past failed relationships and current illicit ones (*John 4:18*). As any of us would do, she sidestepped that sensitive issue and redirected the focus, in this case, to controversial national concerns. As an aside, Jesus shows gentle wisdom and tact by not proceeding along those original lines, but instead allows the woman to redirect. Jesus is interested in convicting, not shaming. Returning to their conversation, the woman takes her golden opportunity to have a prophet settle a hot topic question about proper worship sites (*John 4:20*). Presented with options, Jesus' classic answer of neither (*John 4:21, John 9:3*) both disappoints and enlightens at the same time. He follows up with a very relevant warning: "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (*John 4:23, 24; emphasis added*). Three phrases from these verses tell us that God has preferences in terms of worship:

1. The qualifying expression "true worshippers"
2. The fact that the "Father seeketh" a specific class of worshipers "to worship him"
3. The emphatic phrase that those who would worship "must worship" in a particular manner

These points should shake us out of our subjectivism and tendency to rely on sincerity as the only test of acceptable worship. Having sincere intentions is a *necessary* condition for "true" worship, but it should not be considered the *only* condition. In retrospect, we are grateful that the Samaritan woman broached the topic of worship, because it led to the recording of Jesus' thoughts on the subject. These are thoughts important for us to absorb, because worship is a decisive issue, if not *the* decisive issue, in the closing events of earth's history.

In support of the idea that God can be particular about how He is worshiped, one need only peruse the sanctuary regulations in the books of Exodus and Leviticus. These portions of Scripture also are instructive on the topic of worship. The sheer volume of instructions, the specificity of how they are to be carried out, and the severe penalty if carried out improperly support the notion that God does indeed care about how He is to be worshiped.

Another Woman Brings Up Worship

On the flip side of things, there is at least one example in which a man worshiped before God spontaneously in a moment of free expression. This, in turn, offended his spouse who believed he was making a fool of himself. It is written that David "danced before the LORD with all his

might” as the ark was being brought into Jerusalem (*2 Sam. 6:14, ESV*). This moment was filled with sacrifices and “with shouting and with the sound of the horn” (*2 Sam. 6:13–15, ESV*). His only defense to his offended wife, Michal, was that his actions were “ ‘before the LORD’ ” (*2 Sam. 6:21*). That’s it. His focus was on celebrating and worshiping before God. He even adds, “I am willing to shame and humiliate myself even more than this!” (*2 Sam. 6:22, NET*). This balances out a potentially skewed picture of God that some might derive from the innumerable sanctuary-related regulations and reminds us that there is a spontaneous and subjective side to worship that also is pleasing to the Lord.

The lesson brings out these balancing concerns using Jesus’ emphasis that the Father must be worshiped in “spirit and in truth” (*John 4:24*). We must have both the truth of what God requires and fully engaged hearts and minds that are receptive to the Holy Spirit. But is there a possibility that what we label as the Christian God is not the God of the Bible but a god of our own making? Perhaps worshiping God “in truth” means being sure we have a true image of God in our minds.

Lessons From Sociology

How do societies often come up with their ideas about God? One theory, which draws heavily upon the philosophy of the father of modern sociology, Emile Durkheim, proposes that, first, societies develop a set of traits and values that they believe will ensure their survival. Second, they symbolize their traits and values with an animal. That animal is referred to as a totem, and the totem is the representation of the traits and values of a tribe. We all use totemic language to some degree. In the West, we say things like “strong as an *ox*,” “wise as an *owl*,” or “sly as a *fox*.” Stage three occurs when, little by little, the tribe begins to worship the animal that is a symbolic representation of its own traits and values. Now the point becomes clear. If societies end up worshiping a deity that is simply a collective manifestation of its own traits and values, then religion is nothing more than a tribe of people worshiping itself. People may think this process applies only to some primitive tribe outside of Western culture, but they should not be so hasty in their conclusions. There may be much truth in the adage often attributed to George Bernard Shaw that “God may have created us in his image, but we have decided to return the favor.” Lucifer in the Garden painted a picture of God as a restrictive, lying (“you shall not surely die”), insecure (threatened at the prospect of man’s elevation) deity (*Gen. 3:1–6*). But we’d say Lucifer was painting a rather accurate picture of himself.

Educating Adventists, young and old, to avoid the tendency to impute

to God characteristics that are not His should be a priority. The prohibition of making any “graven image” (*Exod. 20:4, 5*) should include false mental images that can be “graven” on the hearts and minds of young people and then worshiped. God has wisely reminded us that His ways are not like our ways (*Isa. 55:8, 9*) and that He is “God, and not man” (*Hos. 11:9, ESV*).

Part III: Life Application

Here are a few examples and sketches of worship that should spawn discussion for worshipping on a daily basis.

1. **William Temple is believed to have said that “worship is the submission of all of our nature to God. It is the quickening of the conscience by [H]is holiness; the nourishment of mind with [H]is truth; the purifying of imagination by [H]is beauty; the opening of the heart to [H]is love; the surrender of will to [H]is purpose—all this gathered up in adoration.” How can we live each one of these points day to day?**

2. **“And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide” (*Gen. 24:63*). You’d be meditating, too, if your never-before-met spouse was soon to approach, riding a camel. Because the word translated as “meditate” is a hapax legomenon (a word occurring only once in the Bible), we are uncertain of its meaning. Nevertheless, being out in nature alone with God, and with a life-changing event on the horizon (literally), worshipping and meditating on God seems appropriate. What places, times, and methods have the students in your class found conducive to worship?**

3. Interestingly, the first time the English word *worship* occurs in the Bible is when Abraham tells his servants that he and his son are going “yonder” to worship (*Gen. 22:5*). The salvation story is echoed in the experience that Abraham and Isaac share on top of Mount Moriah. How can the plan of salvation enrich and direct our personal worship?

Notes


