

Glorifying God

By Ron Owens

We were created to worship God. It begins at new birth when we're born again. It continues for the rest of our life down here. And of course, we know from scripture, that that is one thing we're going to be doing for the rest of eternity. Now, as we just as response to some of the things that we've been observing here this morning, I would like you to bow your heads with me just for a moment of prayer as we get into the subject of worship. Would you please pray with me?

[Singing] Lord, take these hands. May they serve you in all they do. As I worship You. Take this voice. May it speak day and night for you as I worship You. Take these feet. May they walk only in Your ways. Take my mind, eyes and ears. Use them for Your prayer, Lord, by Your spirit, use me. May your light shine through me, lord, with your life Refill me so the world around will see Your hands extended to them, reaching for them, you loving them through me and showed you died to set them free.

Please join me in this prayer. [Singing] In my life, Lord, be glorified today. In this prayer, Lord, we make in Your precious name, the name that is above every other name, the name of Jesus. Amen.

You know, we often sing about glorifying the Lord. We often talk about glorifying the Lord. And we've just prayed a prayer together. Asking God to glorify Himself through us. But do you know what is at the core meaning of the verb, or the word, "to glorify"? It is this: if you glorify

something or someone, you are going to give a correct interpretation of what that person or that thing is. To glorify means to give a correct interpretation or estimate of something or someone.

Therefore, if we are going to glorify the Lord, we are going to give a correct interpretation, to the world we live in, of what He is like. It's awesome when you think of it about it, isn't it? I found through my own life that it's a lot easier to sing about glorifying the Lord than it is to really practice it in our daily living. But you see, we as His children, we are either going to give a correct interpretation of what He is like to the world around us, or we're not going to give a correct interpretation of what He is like.

I think fundamental to how we worship is how we see God. Our interpretation of what God is like, our view of God is going to determine how we even approach Him in worship. The Mighty One, the Majestic One. The One who is just. The One who is merciful. The Holy One. Now, it's not surprising when the world out there, the world in which we live, attempts to bring God down to their level or give an incorrect interpretation of what he is like.

And the world is doing a pretty good job of that today, isn't it? However, there was a day in the history of our nation when there was a God consciousness. There was a day in our nation when the president and the congress would literally--watching what was happening in the nation--wondered whether or not God was actually judging America for the sins of the nation. And they would call the entire nation to a day of humiliation, to a day of prayer, to a day of fasting, crying out to God for mercy, repenting of the sins of the nation. Every business was closed, every

government building was closed. Everybody was asked to get on their knees and pray and ask for God's mercy.

Well, it's not like that anymore. But we of all people, if the world is not going to do it, we have all people must develop and project the correct image of what God is like. Because as I said, fundamental to offering God acceptable worship is having a correct view of Him. And, you know, if our view of God is anything other than His self-revelation in scripture, then the God we worship, the God we say we serve, is one of our own making in one fashioned to suit what we want God to be. Because God has self-revealed, he has revealed himself in Scripture. Everything we need to know about God is in His word.

A magnificent view of the Apostle Paul's view of God is found in the first letter he wrote to his son in the Gospel, Timothy. In that first chapter he burst into this doxology: "Now to the King, eternal, immortal, invisible to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen." Every letter that Paul wrote, every single prayer he prayed, every sermon the Apostle Paul preached, was shaped by his view of God. It never wavered. The God he served was the God who had provided a lamb for Abraham on Mount Moriah. This was the God Jacob encountered in the night of wrestling. And you remember he had a different name for the rest of his life and he also walked with a limp.

This was the God who revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush. This was the same God who had delivered his people out of Egyptian slavery and who declared at Mount Sinai that he was the only God. This was the God that Saul of Tarsus met on his way to Damascus. An

encounter that would instantaneously change the church's most ardent persecutor into the New Testament's greatest missionary. The Apostle Paul's uncompromising dedication to the one who alone is wise was shaped by his view of God, the view that was so phenomenal that there were times when he hardly sensed that he even didn't have the words to express how he felt.

This was a God that overwhelmed him, because this was a God who disclosed who he was in the form of a man, and that this disclosure was made in his only son, Jesus Christ. And for the rest of Paul's life, he lived in absolute awe that in Christ, God revealed the perfect picture of who he was. The worship of the New Testament, we find, is always through Christ, in Christ and for Christ. And this must be true for us today if we're going to offer God acceptable worship.

You see, the work of the Holy Spirit Himself is to keep our eyes on the Lord, because our very living and therefore our worship is to be of Him and through Him and for Him. And as long as we keep that focus, we'll stay on track. But the moment that we step beyond the boundaries of God's word, we're in danger of forming opinions about God that fit our own personal experiences or lifestyle. You know, today there's so much emphasis on experiences in the Evangelical church.

And if an experience a person has is perceived to have done that person some good, then the experience must be acceptable or right, even though it may contradict Scripture's view of God's character. Some time ago, a minister acquaintance of ours went to visit where a certain movement in recent years began. Certain movement that was called Revival. And we met him in an airport after he had been there. And he strongly endorsed this movement because he said,

when I got there, my cholesterol dropped by 14 points. But in the endorsing of that movement, I believe that he had to overlook.

Many things and he had to endure some things that were contrary to the Bible's description of our awesome, majestic God. We live in a day when this seeking-after experiences is as much a part of the life of the Evangelical church, it seems, as a new ager, and I think we're often guilty of trying to adapt God to our ways rather than adapting to His. Our concept of God is sure to be faulty when He is conceived out of our emotions or out of our preconceived notions or out of what makes us feel good rather than out of His word.

I think probably more this happens as much or even more in the area of music than in any other way. And again, I talk as a musician, we've been around a long time, but because of its powerful influence on our emotions and this is dangerous, because just because something makes us feel good does not necessarily always make it right, because our highest thoughts arrived at apart from the truth of His Word can mount no higher than our emotions or natural mind can reach. And when this happens, do we really see God?

Or do we see something created by our own experiences and imagination and folk in a secular world that is constantly vying for our thought life? In a Christian world that often interprets who God is by experiences and thinks it needs to bring God down closer to man's level in order to make Him more accessible. It is vital that we continuously think of and on the excellency and the majesty of God. And when we do, we will be driven to the depth of worship that Job, Isaiah, Habakuk reached.

And we too will bow in dust and ashes before the awesome, holy God of glory. The psalmist said in Psalm 104, "Oh, Lord my God, you're very great. You're clothed in splendor and majesty."

The Puritans used to have a saying. They said, "Think greatly of the greatness of God." And I think this is one of the root problems we're facing today, even in our worship. Many times the measure in which we know God is not the measure that He has placed in His Scripture. Because you see, the measure in which we know Him is the measure in which we're going to be able to worship Him. And the means by which we get to know Him is through his word in Scripture.

As I already said, we have a revelation of His nature, His acts and His ways, who He is. As I said earlier, I think in my seminar yesterday afternoon, there's not an exaggeration to say that many people today know God for what He does rather than for who He is. How many of you have read the little book, "Practicing the Presence of God: the Story of Brother Lawrence"? That monk, the outskirts of Paris many years ago. He loved God so much that well, he was such a godly person that literally heads of state and people would come to just be in his presence and to pray for him or have him pray for them.

And he loved God so much that he one day was heard to say, oh, I wish I could do something for God, that he would not know that it was Brother Lawrence doing it for him, so he wouldn't pay me back. I just want to do something for Him and He not pay me back for it. I wish I could do it such a way He wouldn't even know I was doing it, but just somebody anonymously was doing it for Him. Oh, what a what a contrast to so much of today when so many of our people even come to church to get rather than to give.

People who sit out there as spectators and seeing what's going to be served up to them. And if they don't like what's served, they're going to find another church that they like. And that's the reason for most of the church hopping today, going from one church to the other. And a lot of it is over music. But I don't like the music, so I'm going to go to church where I like the music. Maybe God has placed you in that church for you to serve. Maybe you are to be a part of that body with the gifts and talents God has given you. And you may not even like the music.

In fact, God has us in a little church right now and I still don't understand fully why we're there. But let me just put this in the music. It's not our kind of music. Well, that's beside the point. I know one of the reasons we're there for just encourage that young pastor when we're home. It's his first pastorate. He loves God. He's doing everything he can to preach God's word. But we're not there much for what we can get, I guess there because I guess that's where God wants us to serve him when we're home.

Brother Lawrence was lying on his deathbed and those who loved him so were tending him. They're wondering he was in the coma and that they expected him just to die, you know, just to go into the presence of the Lord from that coma. But suddenly he awoke and he said, I am not dying. And, you know, they said, Brother Lawrence. What are you doing? This was his answer. I am doing what I have been doing all my life. I am worshiping the God I love. With that, he slipped into the presence of the God he loved, to worship him perfectly.

"The heavens will praise Your wonders," as Psalmist said, "Your faithfulness also in the assembly of the saints. For who in the heavens can be compared with the Lord? Who among the

sons of the mighty can be likened to the Lord? God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints and to be held in reverence by all those around Him. O Lord, God of hosts, who is mighty like you, O Lord? Your faithfulness surrounds You." Well, what is the plumb line for worship in Scripture?

You know, it seems every time you turn around that seems that somebody's setting a new record or proposing some new standard things in our society are constantly in flux. What is a given today is not going to be the given of tomorrow. And it's interesting, isn't it, that it's no longer just the changes are not taking place or the standards are not being changed just in the area of automobile safety and the environment and things like that. But right at the middle of all the changes in our nation is the change in the area of morality.

The changes are happening more quickly here than probably in any other area of our life. And I think we would have to be blind to not observe that when the moral standards change in a nation, they are never raised, that they are always lowered. Today, some political leaders in our nation who call themselves Christian are showing a blatant disregard for what Scripture says about the very things they are condoning and promoting.

Several years ago, Patrick Moynihan, who is not necessarily the most conservative senator in the Senate, he addressed the New York Press Club, and the title of his address was this Defining Deviancy down he said our nation is defining deviancy down. And as our morals lower, he said we are changing the standards, our definition of what morality is, and to adjust. So we have no conviction about what we're doing. It's all right today because that's where our standard of

morality is, folks. That's why the nation on the whole, the majority of people today are endorsing what's happening today because we have so defined deviancy down.

That what is happening is all right now. It's shocking to think that our nation is doing this, but it's even more shocking to find the church doing it. We're the ones who are supposed to be setting the standard, actually, instead of that many times we contribute to the decline in this inclination to reinterpret what God has said in order for it to fit what we want and how we want to live has entered into every part of our lives as Christians, and I believe it's even affecting how we view worship folk.

The standard God set thousands of years ago is as relevant today as it was when Moses carried those tablets down the mountain. The Ten Commandments, as they are known, are the basis of Old Testament law. Of course, the first four deal with our relationship to God. They address His fundamental requirements for worship. Of course, we know the last six commandments deal with our relationship to man. But the commandments are the basis of God's standard of living for His people. And if we desire to please and honor Him, we will obey what He has told us to do.

And if we want to offer Him acceptable worship, we will heed what he says about worship. As we obey these commands, we will personify to the world in our living and in our worshiping, what God is like. For you see, behind each commandment stands God. The commandments reveal His character. 1 Peter 1:15-16 gives this instruction: "But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do, for it is written, be holy because I am holy." Now, God did not give us the commandments to restrict us, but to liberate us. I believe this is where a lot of people

are confused today. Many people think of the commandments as restrictive, but the commandments were given to us so that we could be all that God has created us to be.

And I think the reason such a battle is going on in our lands today, or even whether or not we should hang the Twelve Commandments in government buildings, is because of a misunderstanding of what the commandments are. The world thinks they're going to restrict them because they have never come to faith in Jesus Christ. They can't even think spiritually yet, and so they see them as being restrictive, and to them they are restrictive. But what is sad, when Christians think like the world thinks, do you realize, have you thought about the consequences of this.

One point, one thing before I go on here. One thing that just zapped me the other day or a couple of months ago, and I'd seen this before but I haven't seen. Have you ever heard something you didn't hear? It seems that Patricia accuses me of that more and more. Seems you have to hear something over and over and over again before you really hear it. Well, I'd seen this, but the sequence of events, of events in the delivering of the children of Israel out of Egypt. The commandments were given to the children of Israel after their deliverance from bondage and not before. You said, well, I knew that.

But you see, I think that what we need to see in this is that they were not given so that in any way they could earn their freedom. They were not given before their deliverance. God didn't say to Moses, I'm going to give you now a set of commandments. I'm going to give you these instructions. I want you to take them to my people in Egypt, and as they follow them, as they

obey them, then I will come and deliver them out of Egypt. No. He said, I am the Lord. Your God. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I have seen the misery of my people, so I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land. You cannot earn anything from God, but the commandments were given after their deliverance so that they could live within that freedom. To the extent that God to the degree that God wanted them to be free. They were free. They were free at last. And He gave them the commandments to live within that freedom. A lot of people today think that surely God's going to take into account that what they do, is it's going to count for something. After all, they're not as bad as other folk are.

But you see, if God were to accept anything that you or I were to offer Him of our own righteousness would be like Him turning to his son, the Lord Jesus right now, who seated at His right hand and saying, Son, you did not have to go to Calvary because Sally is so sincere. She's really trying hard. And Bill, you know Bill, you know his situation and he's struggling and he's trying, and I'm going to accept some of the righteousness, and you didn't have to go through what you did. You say well, God wouldn't say that. Well, there are a lot of people today who live as though He would.

Well, what does all this have to do with worship? I believe it has everything to do with it because I believe this is where worship begins. Just as Psalm 24 says, "Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord, who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol nor sworn deceitfully." So the Commandments are God's timeless standards for us, his people. They are not Old Testament or New Testament folk. They are God.

And to disregard any of them and think that our worship will be acceptable to Him is self-deceiving.

As I see it, the first two are really the foundation upon which all true worship is built. And you're going to have to listen more quickly. The first two directly affect our attitude toward God and thus toward worship. The first one: "You shall not bow down to idols or worship them, for I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God." The first commandment God gave to the children of Israel established the fact that he was the only God they were to worship. He knew that those in the culture in which they lived would be worshipping other gods. And He knew that those in the culture in which they lived would be influencing them and that there would be the temptation to become more like the world and keep the standard that he had given to them.

And throughout the Old Testament, the breaking of the first Commandment evoked God's anger against His people more than any other commandment. Because once that first commandment was broken, then the others seemed to follow. You see, in Old Testament times, the idols and nation worship represented the values and belief system of that nation. Every culture had its religious roots and worshipped someone or something. The idols of nation worship represented the influence of that culture to get its citizenry to live by a particular lifestyle. Their idols influence the way they live, what they ate, the music they listen to and the clothes they wore. And as the children of Israel interacted with the nations around them, they often incorporated the gods of those nations into their worship.

And in doing so, they embrace the values of those nations, whether in part or in whole. They embraced the attitudes and lifestyle of that people. And when they did that, God got very angry. God became angry because by their actions they were profane everything he was. He had given them clear guidelines concerning how they were to live. And when his people embraced the culture and gods of the nations around them, those nations would receive a totally false impression of who he was and what he is like and folk that is happening today with the church in our land. There was a day when the church spoke, the nation listened.

But today they don't even know we're around. And when has there ever been a day when we have had greater megachurches and more fantastic programs to use and everything available to us? And yet we seem to be making less impact on the nation we've ever made before. What is the problem? Either they worship Him exclusively or they would come under his disciplining hand and the nations would see even in his or especially in his judging of his people, that He was a holy God.

This, He made clear, didn't He, in His words to the prophet Ezekiel: "Therefore, say to the house of Israel, thus says the Lord, I do this not for your sake, O house of Israel, but for my holy name's sake." Now contrast backsliding Israel with the stand taken by young Daniel and those other three young men who found themselves in the middle of a heathen culture. These youths, about the same age as most of you here, were carried into exile by Nebuchadnezzar. They were given Babylonian names and were told to eat Babylonian food. Daniel, however, resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself in that way.

You remember that at one point Nebuchadnezzar built an image of gold 90ft high and sent word that when the people were to hear the music, everyone was to fall down and worship the image. And this idol represented everything that Babylonian or Babylon stood for. The music represented the heathen culture, and the young Hebrew men knew that they could not compromise, they could not bow down to that idol, for in so doing, they would have renounced their covenant lifestyle, which represented the covenant God had made with his people. They would have broken the commandment not to bow down to any other god, and they knew that if they were to bow down, they would be embracing the lifestyle of another God. And their decision was that they would rather die than break covenant with God.

I wonder how many of us have this kind of commitment to worshiping God alone today. The temptation to give into the idols and the lifestyles of the day is and always will be strong. You know, Jesus, our Lord, faced it Himself. He lived in constant conflict with the idols of His day, but He was committed to a lifestyle governed by His relationship with His father. And His lifestyle ran counter to what the gods of Rome stood for. His message, even His message, ran counter to the Jewish powers of his day, the very ones to whom He had come.

And the forces of darkness led by Satan himself, tried to get Him to renounce his commitment to the Father by taking an easier way. But He refused. And eventually all these forces combined to nail Him to the cross, as we saw this morning, to the cross. But all folk, through that cross and resurrection, all the power of all the gods who ever were or ever will be was stripped away. But we as God's people do not have to succumb to the culture and lifestyle of this world, but in the

power of a victory already won and through the indwelling life of our living Lord, we can live in the world and not be a part of it. Many in the church today are embracing the world, even while professing to serve the Lord and become guilty of breaking the First Commandment. You see, the lifestyles we choose reflect the God we worship. I have so much more to say about that, but I need to just move on. My time is quickly going, let me go to the Second Commandment. By the way, I'm not doing all twelve this morning.

There's an area in Christian worship today that would cause us all concern. It centers around the Second Commandment, where God said to His people, you should not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth below, or that is in the water under the earth. For I, the Lord, am your God. And I am a jealous God. When we read this Commandment, most of us think of that. Certainly we're not guilty of that because we don't bow down to any carved images and we don't have them sitting on our shelf. That would be unthinkable for us as Christians. We're not going to worship that kind of image. But I believe that more than we realize we are doing that kind of thing and are guilty of creating that for ourselves and guilty in creating a false image of God and breaking the Second Commandment.

Let me explain. God has provided a permanent, complete description of who he is and how He works in His Word. And our understanding of who he is must be a result, as I've already said, of his revelation in His Word. Because you see as his people the way we represent our image Him, it must be consistent with how he has imaged Himself. And you remember, even as God was

imaging Himself to Moses and the Ten Commandments up in the mountain, down at the bottom of the mountain, the people were already reimagining God.

Can you believe it? That here, God was there with Moses on the mountain. And even while the Commandments were being given down in the valley, the people were shaping another image of who He was. You see, the entire Old Testament pre-imagined the Son and everything pointed toward Him until in the fullness of time. He in whom all the fullness of the God had dwelt, would be fleshed out among us. God's primary and complete image of Himself was received and revealed in Jesus Christ. And it is no wonder that God is so jealous of how He is portrayed by His people. Some Christians have already said, seek experiences that do not portray God's character as he is portrayed in Scripture. They're not satisfied with how he has imaged Himself in His Word, so they look for something else.

Today, people are running all over the world following phenomena after phenomena that is attributed to God, even though it may vastly be removed from the image he has portrayed in Scripture. They travel far and wide hoping that. They too will experience some unusual tangible experience of him. The tragedy is that as soon as they accept anything other than how God has revealed himself or image himself, they open themselves up, I believe to deceiving spirits because we no longer have a standard of plumb line against which to align our experiences.

You know, as God's people, Christians, we've been given the privilege and responsibility of presenting a correct image of him. You see our chief end, our purpose for being is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. I've already told you what it means to glorify God. But all today an

unprecedented measure. I believe in our land we are reimagining Him. I just read an article recently in Orlando Sentinel, Orlando, Florida and they were describing--here's the world describing what they saw when they walked into a Christian bookstore. To walk down the gift aisles at many Christian stores turn up tiny stuffed Bible dolls and Jesus is Dinorific stuffed dinosaurs. They're pink and chartreuse Jesus Loves Me shoelaces. And perhaps for those awkward moments in the confessional, they have testaments breath fresheners that have on them. "Come near to God and He will come near to you."

A correct image of God? But this is not the only way Christians are projecting a faulty image of the God we worship. Watch Christian television, you will find the reimagining of God. Follow some music entertainers, Christian music entertainers and you will see the reimagining of God. Listen to popular self-promoting preachers and you will observe the reimagining of God. Visit the churches that have become theaters and you will participate in the reimagining of God. Watch the Christian soloist who sensually dressed reimages God even as she sings about him. Listen to the preacher tell a joke from the pulpit just to get a laugh. I believe he is reimagining God. Listen to church combos that create an atmosphere of a nightclub. They are imaging God. Attend the church pageants where thousands of dollars are spent hundreds of thousands, millions of dollars are spent on theatrics and you'll find man reimagining God.

Oh, I thank God for a lot of the changes and the new things that are happening today. It's a fresh breath as it were, within the church. But let me issue a warning and I have about 30 more minutes of material here but my time is up. I thank God for so many things that are happening today. But let me issue a caution in closing. I love the drama and I love the way you have done it

here. But oh, don't allow this to take the place of the most essentials as you go back in the history of the church. I've looked back over the history of the church when drama and theatrics were at an all time or at a high in the church, the preaching in the pulpit was at an all time low.

But when the church in history was in revival, and the preaching from the pulpit was strong, like in the Reformation. There was little or none of that. And I think there's a danger of our substituting for God, using things to substitute for God in order to generate something, and it ends up being of the flesh. Not that it has to be, but folk drama and even music ought not to replace prayer and the public reading of scripture and the preaching of God's word in our fulfillment. We were just recently in one of the largest churches in the land. I think I mentioned this yesterday afternoon.

Largest churches in the land. You would know about it when I tell you. It's on television all over the place, and I thank God for what they're doing. We're privileged to be there for their worship services and to minister a little bit. But I timed the amount, total amount of prayer time spent in prayer in a worship service. Forty-five seconds, including the pastoral prayer, the prayer at the offering, and the closing prayer, 45 seconds. In a worship service. My Lord said, my house shall be called a house of prayer when we come together. Number one, we're to be a people of prayer. Number two, we are to worship Him. Number three, we are to read the scripture publicly.

The three things that Apostle Paul said to his son in the ministry, Timothy, he said, when you worship, don't neglect prayer, the public reading of scripture and the preaching of the word. Oh, we love music, but, you know, you don't have to have music to worship God. Now, I'm glad

there has been music, or we would have been out of business for 30 years. I got to close the third commandment, and with this read in just a minute, you shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.

In this, I believe we need to see that. That was the guitar. What happened there. In scripture, a name always represented the character of that person, right? A name always represented who that person was. So anything, brother and sister in Christ, that you do or ever will do in His name must be representative of who He is.