

Of the Object of Worship.

by John Gill

The sermon emphasizes that worship is to be directed solely to the Lord God, acknowledging His nature and the importance of worshiping in spirit and truth.

Scripture: Matthew 4:10, John 4:21

Topics: "Idolatry", "Worship"

Description

John Gill emphasizes that the object of worship is the Lord God, who is to be worshipped both in His essence and in His three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He argues that worship should be directed solely to God, excluding all idols and creatures, as God alone possesses the divine attributes worthy of reverence. Gill highlights the importance of understanding God's nature and perfections as foundational to true worship, and he stresses that worship must be both internal and external. He also points out that the worship of any other being, including angels and saints, is idolatry and contrary to the command of God. Ultimately, Gill calls believers to worship God in spirit and truth, recognizing Him as the only true object of worship.

Transcript

A Body of PRACTICAL Divinity

Book 1--Chapter 1

OF THE WORSHIP OF GOD,

OR PRACTICAL RELIGION OF THE OBJECT OF WORSHIP

Have, in the former part of this work, proved there is a God, from the light of nature and reason, from the works of creation, &c. and now my business is to show that this God is to be worshipped; I have treated of the nature, perfections, and attributes of God, which are the foundation of the worship of him; and now I shall treat of worship itself. I have considered the various works of God, the works of creation, providence, and grace; and these may be used as so many arguments to engage us to divine worship, or as so many reasons why we should glorify God with our bodies and spirits, which are his; or, in other words, worship him both internally and externally; and I shall begin with the object of worship, for which we have a plain direction, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matthew 4:10).

Two things are to be observed and considered (1) That the Lord God is the object of worship. (2) That he alone is the object of worship, to the exclusion of all others. 1. The object of worship is the Lord God, God essentially and personally considered. 1a. First, God essentially considered, or as considered in his nature and essence, which is the foundation of worship. Many are the directions and instructions given to "worship God", without specifying any of the persons in the Deity particularly to be worshipped; (see Rev. 14:7; 19:10; 22:9).

The "Lord" is to be worshipped; the Lord, who is the one Jehovah, and whose name alone is Jehovah (Deut. 6:4; Ps. 83:18). The word "Lord" in the New Testament answers to "Jehovah" in the Old, a name expressive of the existence or being of God, and of him as the fountain of being, and the author of being to all others; who is the everlasting "I am, which is, and which was, and which is to come"; these words of John are a proper deciphering of the word "Jehovah", or the "I am that I am" in (Ex 3:14).

Now he whose essence is simple, uncompounded, immutable, infinite, eternal, &c. is to be worshipped, even the Lord "thy" God, thy Creator, thy Benefactor, thy Supporter, and Preserver. Thus the apostle describes the proper object of worship unknown to the Athenians, as he who made the world, and all things in it; and gives life, and breath, and all things to his creatures; and in whom they live, move, and have their being (Acts 17:23,25,28). Thus Jacob invoked God, which to do is a part of religious worship, who had "fed" him "all" his "life long to that day" (Gen. 48:15).

David says, his prayer, which is a part of worship, should be to the "God of his life", who had given him life and upheld him in it (Ps. 42:8), he who is the "true God", the "living God", and the "everlasting King", is the object of worship; the true God, in distinction from nominal gods, from such who are falsely so called; the living God, in distinction from idols of gold and silver, the work of men's hands, lifeless statues, in whom there is no breath; but the true God, and who is to be worshipped, has life in and of himself, originally and underivatively, and is the fountain and giver of life to others, and from everlasting to everlasting he is God.

He is by nature God; there are some who are not so, and therefore not to be served and worshipped (Gal. 4:8), but God is a spirit, is of a spiritual nature, and to be worshipped in spirit and in truth; his nature is most perfect, has all perfections in it, though there is no finding him out unto perfection; his nature is infinite and incomprehensible, beyond all conception and thought, beyond all words and expressions, exalted above all blessing and praise. The name of God, the very first name by which he is called in scripture, "Elohim" (Gen. 1:1), implies worship, and that he is to be worshipped who created the heavens and the earth, for it comes from a word (See the Body of Doctrinal Divinity, Book 1, Chapter 3) which signifies to worship.

And to this the apostle seems to allude when he says that antichrist exalts himself "above that is called God", or "that is worshipped", intimating that the name of God signifies sebasma, the object of worship (2 Thess. 2:4). 1b. Secondly, God personally considered, or God considered in the three persons, is the object of worship. "The Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one", are one God, and so equally the object of divine worship. 1b1. First, The Father, of whom Christ expressly says, that men shall "worship the Father" (John 4:21,23), and of the propriety of this there can be no doubt, since his Deity is not denied by any, and was it, they would easily be confronted; he is expressly called "God the Father" (Phil. 2:11), and sometimes "God even the Father" (1 Cor. 15:24; 2 Cor. 1:3), all the perfections of Deity are attributed to him, as immutability, eternity, &c. and the works of creation, providence, and grace; and he has undoubtedly a proper claim of worship from his creatures, and accordingly worship is given to him, and acts of it are exercised on him.

Baptism, which is a solemn act of religious worship under the New Testament dispensation, is administered in his name; and his name stands first in the form of it, baptizing in the name of the Father", &c. which signifies not only its being done by his authority and command, but the persons, by submission to it, devote themselves to him, profess to be his, and lay themselves hereby under an obligation to serve him; and because to do this in the name of a creature would be idolatry and irreligion, the apostle Paul was thankful that he had baptized no more of the Corinthians than he had, when he found they were for setting him up as the head of a party among them, lest they should think they were baptized in his name.

Prayer is another part of divine and religious worship, which is made to the Father, and indeed is generally made to him; the access and address are most frequently to him, not but that they may be equally made to the other two persons, as will be presently seen; but the reason why they are usually to him is because he bears no office, whereas the others do, and an office which is concerned in the business of prayer. Christ is the mediator through whom the access is, and in whose name the petition is put up; and the Spirit is the spirit of supplication, by whose aid and assistance prayer is made: the whole of this may be observed in one passage; for "through him", through Christ the mediator, "we both", Jews and Gentiles, "have an access" at the throne of grace "by one spirit", who helps and assists us in our supplications "unto the Father", the Father of Christ and of us (Eph. 2:18), see an instance of a large prayer of the apostles to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in (Eph. 3:14-21), and it is easy to observe, that at the beginning of many of the epistles such a prayer or wish is made, as "Grace be to you, and peace from God our Father", as distinguished from the Lord Jesus Christ; which is a petition for grace, an increase of grace, and all necessary supplies of it, and for all spiritual prosperity and happiness.

Thanksgiving, another act of religious worship, which is sometimes included in prayer, and sometimes performed as a distinct part of worship, is made to the Father. "Giving thanks always for all things" for all temporal and spiritual blessings, "unto God and the Father", the Father of Christ and of us in him, "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:20). Acts of faith, hope, and love, which are acts of worship, are exercised on him; "ye believe in God", that is, in God the Father (John 14:1), who raised Christ from the dead; that "the faith and hope" of saints "might be in God" the Father, who raised him from thence (1 Pet. 1:21), and where those graces are love is, and is exercised on the same object; and as the Father was the object of Christ's love as man and mediator, so he is the object of the love of those that believe in him (John 14:31). 1b2.

Secondly, the Word, or Son of God, is also the object of worship; "he is thy Lord, and worship thou him" (Ps. 45:11), yea, he is to be worshipped with the same sort of worship, and to be honored with the same degree of honour the Father is (John 5:23), for he is the Lord, the Jehovah, thy God, as Thomas said, "My Lord, and my God"; the mighty God, the great God, God over the true God and eternal life; who has the same perfections his Father has; and the same works his Father does are done by him (Col. 2:9; John 5:19), and therefore to be worshipped with the same worship, and so he is.

Baptism is administered in his name equally as in the Father's "baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son", &c. and sometimes his name only is mentioned (Acts 10:48; 19:5). Prayer, which is an act of worship, is made to him; it is said, "prayer shall be made for him continually"; it may as well be rendered, as some think, "prayer shall be made to him continually" (Ps. 72:15). Invocation of his name, which is a part of religious worship, is spoken of him; his disciples and followers are sometimes described by those that "called upon his name" (Acts 9:14; 1 Cor. 1:2) and it may be observed, that in the beginning of many epistles before referred to, the same prayer or wish for grace and peace to the saints, is made to Christ as to God the Father; Stephen, the proto-martyr, when expiring, called upon God, saying, "Lord

Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59), to which may be added the doxologies or ascriptions of glory, which are high acts of worship, are sometimes made to Christ separately (2 Pet. 3:18; Jude 1:25; Rev. 1:5,6).

Also the acts of faith, hope, and love, are exercised on him as on God the Father; "Ye believe in God" the Father, says Christ, "believe also in me" (John 14:1). Trust and confidence are not to be put in a creature, for "cursed be the man that trusteth in man" (Jer. 17:5). Christ is the object of the hope and love of his people, and as such is often represented (1 Tim. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:8), in whom they hope for happiness, and who have an affectionate devotion for him. And it is easy to give instances of adoration which have been made unto him; thus he was worshipped by Jacob, when he invoked him to bless the sons of Joseph, saying, "The angel which redeemed me from all evil bless the lads" (Gen. 48:16).

By the angel cannot be meant God the Father, for he is never called an angel; nor any created angel, whom Jacob would never have invoked; but the uncreated angel, Christ, the Angel of the covenant, his Redeemer from all evil. He was also worshipped by Joshua, who appeared to him, and made himself known to him as "the captain of the host of the Lord, who is the leader and commander of the people, the captain of our salvation"; upon which notice, "Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship", for which he was not reproved, nay, encouraged, yea was further ordered to "loose his shoe from off his foot", for it is said "the place whereon thou standest is holy, and Joshua did so"; which was never ordered to be done, but where God himself was, whose presence gave a relative holiness to the place where he appeared (Joshua 5:13-15).

Christ was also worshipped by the wise men who came from the east to seek him and see him; and so by others in the days of his flesh, and by his disciples when he parted from them and went up to heaven; yea he has been worshipped not only by men but by angels, and that by a divine order, "Let all the angels of God worship him" (Heb. 1:6). The first begotten; the same with the only begotten Son of God, who is God; or otherwise it would be a piece of idolatry to worship him; and we have an instance of many angels with others paying their adoration to him (Rev. 5:12,13). 1b3.

Thirdly, the Holy Spirit is also the object of worship equally with the Father and the Son. He is with them the one God. He is possessed of all divine perfections, such as eternity, omniscience, omnipresence, &c. he was concerned in creation, and is in the government of the world, and in the operations of grace (Ps. 33:6; Isa. 40:13,14; 1 Cor. 12:4-11), and so worthy of worship, and it is given unto him. Baptism is administered in his name, equally as in the name of the Father and of the Son (Matthew 28:19).

Prayer is made unto him; not only is he the Spirit of grace and of supplication, and who helps the saints under their infirmities in prayer, but he is prayed unto; "the Lord", that is, the Lord the Spirit, "direct your hearts", &c. where all the three persons are mentioned as distinct (2 Thess. 3:5), so grace and peace, as they are wished and prayed for from God and Christ, so "from the Seven Spirits which are before the throne"; by which are meant the one Spirit of God so called, because of the fulness of divine perfections in him, and because of the perfection of his gifts and graces (Rev. 1:4,5).

Moreover his graces wrought in the saints, as they come from him, they are exercised on him, as faith, trust, and an holy confidence in him, that he who has begun the good work in them will finish it; and there is also the love of the Spirit, a cordial love of him, and a carefulness not to grieve him by whom they are sealed unto the day of redemption. 2. God only is the object of worship, to the exclusion of all others. 2a. First, all idols of whatsoever kind are excluded, not only images of things in heaven or in earth, or in the sea, and the idols of gold and silver, the work of men's hands, forbidden by the second command; but also

the idols set up in a man's heart, to which such respect is paid as is due to God only; of such may be read in Ezekiel 14:4 and which God promises to cleanse his people from by his Spirit and grace (Ezek. 36:25), and which when converted they declare they will have no more to do with, in the manner they have, who before conversion served divers lusts and pleasures (Hosea 14:8; Titus 3:3), and these perhaps are the idols the apostle John warns the children of God to keep themselves from (1 John 5:21).

The idol the worldling is enamoured with, and in which he places his trust and confidence, is gold and silver; hence covetousness is called idolatry, and such a man is said to be an idolater (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5), nor can the true God and this idol mammon be served and worshipped by the same (Matthew 6:24). The epicure, or voluptuous person, his god is his belly, which he serves, and in which he places all his happiness, and cannot be said to serve the Lord and worship him (Phil. 3:19; Rom. 16:18).

The self-righteous man makes an idol of his righteousness, he sets it up and endeavors to make it stand, and to establish it, and then falls down to it and worships it, putting his trust and confidence in it (Luke 18:9). 2b. Secondly, every creature in the heavens, or on the earth, are excluded from divine worship. As the sun, moon, and stars; these seem to be the first objects of worship among the idolatrous heathens; and indeed when men departed from the true God what could they think of to place in his room but those glorious creatures so visible to them, from whom they received light and heat, and many blessings? hence the Israelites were cautioned against lifting up their eyes unto them, and gazing on them, lest they should be ensnared into the worship of them (Deut. 4:19).

The next objects of idolatrous worship were men, heroes and mighty kings, famous for their exploits; these are the gods many and the lords many, the Baalim often spoken of in scripture, as Baalpeor, Baalberith, &c. Neither good nor bad men are to be worshipped; when an attempt was made to sacrifice to the apostles, they rejected it with the greatest vehemence and abhorrence (Acts 14:1-28), and it is the height of iniquity and blasphemy in antichrist to suffer himself to be worshipped, yea, to command it; and a damnable sin in his followers to do it (Rev. 13:4,8,15; 14:9-11).

Yea, angels are excluded from divine worship; this sort of idolatry was introduced in the times of the apostles, but condemned (Col. 2:18), and rejected by angels themselves (Rev. 19:10; 22:9). And much less are devils to be worshipped; and yet the worship of such has obtained among the blind and ignorant heathens, as in the East and West Indies; and even the sacrifices of the Jews to new gods their fathers knew not, and the sacrifices of the heathens are said to be offered to devils, and not to God; yea the worship of saints departed by the Papists, as the doctrine of it is called the doctrine of devils, so the practice is represented as if it was no other than worshipping of devils; it being contrary to the worship of the true God, who only is to be worshipped (Deut. 32:17; 1 Cor. 10:20; 1 Tim. 4:1; Rev. 9:20).

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