

X. Contending and Defending the Faith in Biblical Perspective
Contending and Contenders—Defending and Defenders
“Worship God”

Revelation 19:9-10; Revelation 22:8-9

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I'd like to start with the scripture in Acts 17 that we used in the last study. Acts 17:16-34 says [16] *Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. [17] So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. [18] Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, “What does this babbler wish to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. [19] And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? [20] For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.” [21] Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.*

[22] *So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. [23] For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. [24] The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, [25] nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. [26] And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, [27] that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, [28] for “‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, “‘For we are indeed his offspring.’*

[29] *Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. [30] The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, [31] because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”*

[32] *Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, “We will hear you again about this.” [33] So Paul went out from their midst. [34] But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.*

Our theme this year is contending and defending the faith. We are doing this for two reasons. One is because of that which is occurring all around us with the diminishing of Biblical teaching within even the evangelical church as well as the church in general in our culture and Satan has done his work to put in false teachers and leaders. So we need to contend for the faith. Also there is the attempt in our society today to sanitize the

public square of any of the free practice of religion and thereby the intimidation of Christians into silence or withdrawal from holding fast the Word of God in the public arena.

This is not new and the second reason we are looking at this is because Jesus warned us, prophesied and declared this would happen and of Satan's two strategies. One is his strategy of intimidation from the outside by persecution which can be through state sponsored, the cultural elite, intellectual, emotional and all kinds of persecution. His second strategy would be from the inside through infiltration to infiltrate with false teachers and the fellowship of God's people as well.

How do you handle the infiltration? Jude 1:3-4 tells us to contend for the faith once and for all delivered for the saints. Our catch phrase is to contend with courage and conviction yet without personal contentiousness. How do you handle outside intimidation? Our key passage for this was I Peter 3:13-17 where you give the reason for the hope that is within you when they ask you so you are to be ready to do this. Our catch phrase for is that we defend the faith with diligence and determination without personal defensiveness.

There are always two objectives. One is to dismantle the soul damning heresies and two is to win the opponents to a personal relationship with Christ. Both of those objectives are to be our desire. Having said that we have taken time in looking at contending and now we are looking closer at defending and in the last study we opened up a cast study with Paul at Athens. I know most of you are pretty smart people where you wouldn't go into any situation without knowing the lay of the land. Paul, from this text in Acts 17, has given you the lay of the land for you to defend the faith.

In this last study I gave you seven things for you to know to be an effective defender of the faith from this text in Acts 17. Here are the seven things to know. Number one is that everybody you meet is a believer. The devil is a believer. Atheists have a faith commitment that works into a world life view that governs their life. Number two is that everyone is religious. Paul said "I have seen the objects of your faith and that you're very religious." Number three is that everybody you meet is a worshipper. You were made to worship and created to worship and it's not a matter of if you worship but what, who and how you worship. Number four is that we're sinners. That means that if God doesn't intervene then our faith, religion and worship will not only be unacceptable but counterproductive and destructive.

Number five is that it's not working. That's why they are always talking about something new and had to create a god to fit into the gap – the unknown god. He is actually a known God, the God of glory that reveals Himself in creation but unknown to them because they hide from Him, suppress Him and set Him aside. There will always be inconsistencies and contradictions yet Paul steps in to give them the truth of that. Number six is that we have been entrusted with the solution that they need and it's called the Gospel. Number seven is that two things have to happen for them to be right with God to have saving faith. One is that they need a Holy Spirit empowered ambassador of the faith who will come and bring the Gospel to them in love and truth. Two they need the Holy Spirit to give them eyes to see, ears to hear and a heart to believe.

Out of those seven things one of the key elements is worship. It is my premise that we need to tackle this issue of what worship is in the life of the believer and in the life of the church. How should we view worship? Most of us have a very man-centered

view of worship. Here is the giveaway. We go to a worship service, we walk away, see somebody that is not there and say ‘I didn’t see you at worship this morning, you should have been there for you missed a blessing.’ What did we come to church for? A blessing, for that is the giveaway for man-centered worship. Do I need a blessing? Absolutely. Is a consequence of God-centered worship a blessing? Absolutely, but it is not the objective.

The objective of worship is to bless the Lord O my soul and all that is within me bless His holy Name. Now the glorious thing is when you come for the purpose to bless Him then the blessing comes to you but we don’t go to get the blessing. Pastors sometimes view the worship services like getting the stockholders all together for this is their chance to be the CEO to give direction to the church and what everybody needs to be doing. So there is the blessing view of worship and then it’s the staff’s way of getting people together to get them to do what we want them to do yet I do think mission and vision is actually communicated when we gather for worship but that’s not the objective to worship. Then there is the classroom view to worship where you get in, sing a few songs and get to the preaching of the service. We come to learn something about the Bible. Do we learn something about the Bible? Absolutely for the Scriptures are open in teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness and that is a consequence. Getting a blessing, learning and being directed with mission and vision is a consequence of worship but it is not the purpose of worship. The purpose of worship is the exaltation of the One true and living God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

These people from their faith commitment and their religion were worshippers but it was false worship. It was worship that was unacceptable to the Lord. In this study I’d like to look at four passages of Scriptures and then give you some thoughts for you to take with you from this. This is worthy of much more than I will give it in this study but we’ll start by looking at Revelation 19. I want to give you some observations on worship from the book of Revelation and the book of John.

Revelation 19 is a wonderful moment that has to do with the marriage feast of the Lamb. Here is the Lamb and His bride being brought together at the marriage feast. Revelation 19:9-10 says [9] *And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.” [10] Then I (John) fell down at his feet to worship him (the angel making the announcement), but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.” For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*

Now let’s look at Revelation 22:8-9 which says [8] *I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, [9] but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”* Now let’s look at John 4. I am fully cognoscente that every one of these passages deserves much more treatment than I can give it in this study but I simply have one commitment in this study. I believe you were created to worship. I believe you were saved to worship. I believe you are sustained to worship. I believe the Father authored your existence and you were created through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit gave order to the creation.

Father, Son and Spirit, authored, accomplished and applied creation and I think the same thing is true in redemption. Ephesians 1:3-14 but in particular 1:11-12 says *[11] In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, [12] so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.* The Father authored our salvation to the praise of His glory and grace. The Son accomplished our salvation to the praise of His glory and grace. The Holy Spirit applied our salvation to the praise of His glory and grace. I believe the breath you have, the ability you have to think and move that in Him you move and have your being because the Father has promised His benevolence to you. It comes through the enthroned Jesus who now intercedes for you and it comes by way of the Holy Spirit who intercedes for you with groaning's too deep to be uttered. The reason He has done this is for worship that you might praise His holy Name.

Are the blessings extraordinary by being made in His image, being saved by His grace and sustained in His power? The blessings are enormous. I am headed to heaven. I have a new heavens and a new earth that I will dwell in for all eternity. The power of sin has been broken in my life. The practice of sin is being eradicated in my life. The penalty of sin has been cancelled in my life. I have all kinds of blessings but the objective as to why He made me, saved me and sustains me is worship. That is why our catechism is put together so simply. What is the chief end of man? Why did He make you? Why did He save you? Why does He sustain you? The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. The more you glorify Him the more you enjoy Him and the more you enjoy Him the more you glorify Him.

I do not believe until we make gathered worship of God's people by intention (I know we won't get it perfectly) God-centered we will be capable to do God's work in this world. I believe worship sets the thermostat of the Christian life. I used to think when I read in Exodus where Moses would tell Pharaoh to let God's people go to worship Him that God was just pulling a fast one in order to get them out of Egypt but that was really the first step just to get them free. Yet that was not it for that was the objective God had was for them to worship. They were to go to the mountain of God and worship Him. That was the objective as to why they were being set free, for the praise of His glorious Name. I think it was at the sixth plague that Pharaoh told Moses they would set up a place in Egypt for them to worship but Moses said 'No, if we were to worship in your midst you would find odious.'

I am fully aware that worship services have to contextualize in a culture's vocabulary and setting but worship ought to be countercultural. Our culture exists out of a drive for narcissistic exaltation. The worship of God ought to stand in contrast for we haven't come for ourselves but we have come to praise His holy Name. Bless the Lord O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy Name. That's what puts the spine in the martyrs at the posts. That's what puts the courage and love to speak to the lost to defend the faith. That's what happens when we have set the thermostat for gathered worship to God-centered worship, not man-centered.

I know we are guilty of man-centered worship to at least to some degree. It happens every time we leave the worship center and we say 'What did you think of the music, or the sermon? How do you think Harry did?' It reminds me of the kid who was sitting in the car and the wife said to her husband "I just don't think the sermon was all

that good today?” The husband said “I don’t know why the choir chose that song and do you think they even practiced? It wasn’t that good at all.” The kid in the back said to his dad and mom “What did you expect for a dollar?” We all leave worship services thinking we have become self-appointed Siskel and Eberts. We go through the elements of the service with thumbs up and thumbs down as to whether it pleased us without thinking, did this please the Lord.

In fact I’m not a spectator for worship is a verb. It is not a noun describing the event I went to observe. It is a verb describing the act, latria. It is the work I was called to do. Therefore there was a stage but those people were not on my stage for we were all on God’s stage. The question isn’t what did I think about what they did but what does God think about what I did? Pastor, do you really believe that God evaluates our worship? I absolutely do. I don’t think we worship to get saved. I believe we worship because we’re saved but when the saved worship the Lord is dealing with our worship.

Now let’s look in John 4. Here is the account of the woman at the well. Jesus asks her for water and she wants to know why He would ask her for water. This woman is coming to the well during the middle of the day and that would be the time that ill-reputable women would come. John 4:16-26 says [16] *Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.”* [17] *The woman answered him, “I have no husband.”* Jesus said to her, *“You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; [18] for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.”* [19] *The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. [20] Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.”* [21] *Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. [22] You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. [23] But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. [24] God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”* [25] *The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.”* [26] *Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.”*

This woman begins to ask Jesus where acceptable worship is given. Jesus begins to tell her of the New Covenant where worship will not be the place but who and how that determines acceptable worship. Then He gives two statements where true worshipers must worship Him in Spirit and truth. If there are true worshipers then that tells you there are false worshipers. So I can either be giving true worship or false worship. True worship is defined by the text as Trinitarian, in Spirit and in truth. Where do you get Trinitarian? It is built into the text. Jesus said the Father is seeking true worshipers. We worship the Father through the Son and in the Spirit. Now can you worship Jesus? Yes. Can you worship the Spirit? Absolutely but the warp and woof of worship ought to be Trinitarian.

Take a look at the hymns that have stood the test of time. You will notice that they can be sung, are Biblical, done with excellence and almost all of them are Trinitarian. Look at our great confessions. Our worship is to be distinctly Trinitarian. It just like we were taught to pray. How did Jesus teach us to pray? Pray to the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit. So here we give the true God worship but it is a Trinitarian function. The Father sent the Son. The Son came for us. The Son sent the

Holy Spirit. Now the Holy Spirit brings us back to the Son to give praise to the Father. So the work of the Trinity that came to us is now reversed and brought back into the throne room of God with praise.

That is acceptable worship and is defined as in spirit. That is not referring to Holy Spirit and certainly the Holy Spirit is necessary but that is referring to your spirit. It is your spirit that blesses the Lord O your soul for all that is within you blesses His holy Name. You can't divorce the Holy Spirit from your body. We think that the spirit is inside the body where the body is like a passenger car and the spirit can get out and in. No, that's not it. Your body and spirit are two threads woven into one cloth and what you do physically will affect you spiritually. What you do spiritually will affect you physically. I put it this way. We are supposed to come together on the Lord's Day and worship in spirit yet Saturday night live will be Sunday morning dead. We are not disembodied spirits. The fruit of the Spirit includes self-control. What we do physically will affect us spiritually and vice versa. *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God* (1 Corinthians 10:31).

When we come to worship it is from our soul and spirit that comes in the image of God. My body came in the image of my parents but my soul and spirit comes in the image of God. That drives me and compels me, having been made alive with the power of the Gospel and enlivened by the Holy Spirit, to bless the Lord O my soul. So we worship in spirit and in truth. Truth is not just looking at sincerity. That is looking at the content of our worship. The content of our worship is the Bible. You can't know the God of the Word without the Word of God. When Paul spoke to the Athenians he was not someone with a collection of truths. He is someone who is speaking the truth. Thy word is truth. If you know the truth, His Word, it will set you free.

How do you know Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life? You know Him by His Word. We are people of the Book and our worship is no different. Our songs need to be Biblical. Our confessions need to be Biblical. Our prayers need to be the Bible. There ought to be the reading of the Word of God. There ought to be the hearing of the Word of God. There ought to be the preaching of the Word of God. There ought to be the prayers of God's people framed by the Word of God. God's Word is wrapping up and filling everything in our worship because we are people who function with reason from revelation. We don't reason to the Bible but we reason from the Bible that God gave to us. Here is the truth. Now we will find it reasonable, rational, supra-rational, supra-logical and it will never be irrational, illogical or unreasonable. It will be bigger than me. O God who can know You but it will be that which is true. That has to do with the content of our worship.

So everything done in our worship service (singing, music, offering, sermon) is done because God has commanded it. He commands the reading, the preaching, the giving, the singing of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs and that you confess your faith to one another. Everything in gathered worship is done, not because we wanted to do it, but because it is what God says pleases Him and I have no greater pleasure than to give Him pleasure in worship. This is what He rejoices in and over.

So where does that lead us? Here are some lessons on worship of God from Revelation and John. Number one is that worship is inevitable. You will worship. It may be sports, movie stars or celebrities but you will worship for you were made to worship. The question is who, what and how. Worship is inevitable.

Number two is that not all worship is acceptable, even when the worship is done within the boundaries of what has been set aside as sacred space for worship. Worship is that which is done in spirit and in truth.

Number three is the most mature Christians can falter in worship. How do I know this? How much closer do you think John will be to Jesus than you when you get to heaven? I don't think I'll even get to see the back of his head. Two times John starts to fall down and worships angels. You'd think he would have learned after the first time and then three chapters later he is doing it again. How can you possibly do that again? The most mature Christians can and will falter. We will worship and we have to continually by the power of the Gospel through the Holy Spirit and the Word of God be equipped for God-centered worship. We have a default to worship but we don't have a default to give acceptable worship for we have to learn that. We have to be transformed in our mind to know how to worship the Lord.

Number four is acceptable worship is foundational to the Christian life. It sets within a culture but it is also distinctly counter-culture. I keep going back to those two texts from Revelation and thinking 'Why did John worship the angel two different times?' In Revelation 22 it says 'when he saw and heard, he fell down and worshipped.' The message and the moment moved him to worship but you have to think Holy Spirit-enabled, Bible-shaped to worship rightly. The moment and message can move us to worship but we have to conscientiously, enabled by the Spirit of God think through how to worship rightly and that means I want to worship in spirit. I want to come before the Lord with my heart prepared.

I've noticed that sometimes in Sunday evening worship that there is just a freer flow and things just happen. I think that this happens many times because Sunday morning got me ready for that. So why don't I have a Sabbath Eve preparation which is what our forefathers used to call it. Why don't I meet with the Lord and my family to be prepared for the Lord's Day? My soul is ready. I love singing. God has told us what the elements are of worship but not where to put them and how much time to give to them. We are made in His image and He gives us wisdom from above for all of that but I want you to rejoice not in the singing but the singing of the Word, not just the notes but the content. I want you to think of the Word of God that is read and preached. I want you to think consciously each Lord's Day that we are doing today what God says pleases Him. Now God, help me to give You pleasure from my soul. Bless Your Holy Name.

Here is your takeaway. Worship is God decreed. Worship is to be God directed – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – Triune worship. Worship is to be God-defined. His Word defines our worship. Worship is to be God-enabled. I need the Holy Spirit to worship the Lord. Worship has as its singular objective the glory of our God and in that will come joy to my soul. That will lead me into a life worship for the Lord each and every week. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word. Father, I can't help but think in these past years we have been going through things that are called and dubbed 'worship wars' and how Satan must rejoice over that because that is not what our worship is to be. It is not to be a war with each other but it is to be a war against anything that raises itself up in opposition to Your Word. So Father use our gathered worship to

recalibrate us so that our lives are God-centered for we walk out of worship that is God-centered. You have decreed it, defined it, direct it and enable it and Father, the praise of Your Name through Jesus our Lord, by the power of the Holy Spirit is of You, from You and unto You. Praise to Your Name forever, Amen.