

# The Object of Religious Worship

## Introduction

### a. objectives

1. subject – The proper object of worship is the Triune God through Christ Jesus the mediator
2. aim – To cause us to understand who we worship as Christians, and why it is always through Christ
3. passage – John 4:21-24; 14:6-7

### b. outline

1. The True Object of Worship
2. The False Objects of Worship
3. The Mediatorial Person of Worship

### c. opening

1. the **location** of this paragraph in Chapter 22: Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day
  - a. Bro. Todd dealt with the first paragraph in his seminar, namely:
  - b. that the revelation of nature is such that “there is a God, and everyone knows it”
  - c. and, it is incumbent upon all creatures to worship this God as just and good
  - d. thus, to worship God is to fear, love, praise, call upon, trust, and serve him with all our nature
  - e. but, the acceptable way of worshiping God must be on his terms, not ours as creatures
  - f. and, this worship must be *both* intrinsic to our nature *and* of a “religious” substance
    1. **i.e.** this chapter deals with the *specific act* of worship of a religious nature – the *specific day and content* of such worship, not just the “general” idea of honoring God “with our lives”
2. the **substance** of this paragraph in Chapter 22: Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day  
 “Religious worship is to be given to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and to Him alone; not to angels, saints, or any other creatures; and since the fall, not without a mediator, nor in the mediation of any other but Christ alone.”
  - a. paragraph #2 deals *primarily* with first truth: there is a God, and we are to *religiously* worship him
    1. **i.e.** future paragraphs will deal with its *substance* and *where and when* it is to be given
  - b. so, paragraph #2 is **definitionally subjective** = who is the object of *religious* worship?
    1. **part #1:** who is the *object* of worship (**i.e.** who is God that we are to worship him?)
      - a. **i.e.** the first task is to define which “god” are we referring to
    2. **part #2:** who are *not* to be the objects of worship (**i.e.** what is it to worship God alone?)
      - a. **i.e.** the second task is to contrast *true* worship with *false* worship (or idolatry)
    3. **part #3:** how are we *able* to worship the true God (**i.e.** how can we worship God?)
      - a. **i.e.** the final task is to define how *naturally idolatrous creatures* can ever worship the true God in a way that makes it *truly worship, and not idolatry*

## I. The True Object of Worship

### Content

#### a. the Triune God as the true object of worship

“Religious worship is to be given to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and to him alone”

1. **question:** how would we *ever* go about “describing” the true God (**i.e.** assuming we wished to worship *him* properly; that we understood the *inherent reality* of being a creature under a Creator)?
  - a. more specifically: in a world filled with “gods,” how would we go about distinguishing the *true* God?
    1. **e.g.** is there a distinction between Allah and the God of Christianity? or the Mormon God (who used to be a man), or the Hindu gods, or the Canaanite gods, etc.?
  - b. because: the very essence of “God” is fraught with *both* the limits (falleness) of human reasoning *and* the natural tendency to see “many things” as “gods” (**see below**)
    1. **i.e.** the *ontological argument* for the existence of God (the greatest imaginable being) does not satisfy the *specific question: which greatest being; how do we identify him?*
2. **answer:** the Confession writers use a specific form of identification of the *One True God*: they identify him **as he has revealed himself**: as “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”
  - a. the distinguishing characteristic of the *true* God is his *Triune nature*: a single divine nature eternally existing as three distinct yet co-equal Persons, each possessing the fullness of the Godhead  
 “In this divine and infinite Being there are three subsistence’s, the Father, Word or Son, and Holy Spirit, of one substance, power and eternity, each having the whole divine essence, yet the essence undivided ... all infinite, without beginning, therefore but one God, who is not to be divided in nature and being, but distinguished by several peculiar, relative properties and personal relations” (chap. 2, para. 3)
    1. **i.e.** the Nicene formulation: one God in three Persons

2. any religious system that denies *either* the multi-person nature of God or that the Son is anything “less” than full divinity (sharing the fullness of the Godhead *eternally*) worships a *false God* – unless its worship acknowledges the *Triune nature* of God, it is a false religion
- b. this distinguishing characteristic of the *true God* is *revealed*: it is a nature *utterly foreign* to anything in the created order, thus can only be known by those to whom it is revealed
  1. and, the *fullness* of this revelation comes as God the Son is made known (**John 1**)
  2. **i.e.** the *progressive revelation* of the nature of God is *final* in the Incarnation – the elect see and know *who the true God is* because the Christ reveals him to them (**John 17:6-8**)
 

“I have manifested your name [Father] to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.”
- c. thus, this distinguishing characteristic of the *true God* makes him the *only object of worship*: true worship can *only* be of the One who has revealed himself as the Triune God
  1. all Christian *religious* worship comes before the Triune God to honor and praise *each Person* of the Trinity *in his own right* (**i.e.** to honor and praise each Person equally as God), but according to the degree of “focus” properly ascribed to each in his particular role
    - a. **e.g.** Christian prayer is to be offered to the Father (per Jesus; **Matthew 6:9ff**), yet the focus of Christian honor is primarily given to the Son (per Jesus; **Matthew 28:18ff**)
      1. the Son is the One to whom the other Persons point, in his *relation to us* as those he has come to redeem (**i.e.** the One in which we are included; those “*in Christ*”)
      - b. **LOW**: as the objects of Christ’s redemptive work, and being *able* to know God and come into his presence only because we are included in Christ, we “focus” our worship primarily on the Second Person of the Trinity as the One who brings us before God (**see below**)
    - d. **the true object of religious worship is the Triune God, who has revealed himself to us in the Person and work of Jesus – we honor the Triune God in our worship by honoring the Son, who has completed the decree of the Father and is honored above all else by the Spirit**
      1. **i.e.** the *gospel* of Jesus Christ is the center of our worship

## II. The False Objects of Worship

### Content

#### a. the elements of creation as the false objects of worship

“not to angels, saints, or any other creatures”

1. **note**: sometimes it is necessary to say what is *not true* in order to clarify *what is true*
  - a. **i.e.** the statement above should be enough ... but, because human beings are *fundamentally idolatrous*, this statement needs to be included
  - b. **e.g.** we have a tendency to “worship” celebrities – if one walked in here right now, how we react to his or her entrance; what would we suddenly *feel* if we met such a person (**e.g. weatherman**)?
  - c. so, the Confession writers included this part in order to be clear about our “honoring” others
2. **note**: the *time* that the confession was written also demanded such a response
  - a. **i.e.** the Protestant church struggling out from “under” medieval Roman Catholicism
  - b. so, the Confession writers included this statement to address *specifically* the Roman church
    1. more specifically, the dogma of Romanism that only God is to be worshipped, but that other persons can be *venerated* as a part of the normal life of the Christian
      - a. veneration = the act of *honoring* or granting *great respect* to a duly designated individual without formally worshipping that person; to give *reverence* without treating them as God
      2. **i.e.** Catholicism teaches that various persons can be given veneration, but they are not to be worshipped; however, it is (very often) a “difference without a distinction” = something that the “typical” Catholic cannot distinguish *and very often fails by actually worshipping wrongly*
3. religious worship, *of any kind*, is never to be given to other beings or objects – in contrast to the *de facto* religious activity of Roman Catholics, true worshippers are *never* to “adore” other beings
  - a. not “angels” = not any beings in the supernatural realm (**e.g.** guardian angels; **Rev. 19:10**)
  - b. not “saints” = not any persons *specifically elevated* to lofty positions
    1. **i.e.** those *canonized* (lit. in the book) as saints by the Church due to their extraordinary lives, excess merit (in the Treasury of Merit), and miraculous deeds (**e.g. Saint Patrick**)
  - c. (**although not stated**) not to Mary = not to the elevated “version” of Mary as the perpetual Virgin and/or co-mediatrix with Jesus (**i.e.** in the Rosary; **note**: the Marion dogmas are 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> C.)
  - d. not “any other creatures” = not any other sentient being (**i.e.** animals, birds, etc.; **Rom. 1:25**)
4. **the false object of religious worship is anyone other than the Triune God directly and specifically – we dishonor the Triune God when we “insert” any other being before him**

### III. The Mediatorial Person of Worship

#### Content

##### a. the work of Christ as the mediation of true worship

"and since the fall, not without a mediator, nor in the mediation of any other but Christ alone"

1. mediator = one who intervenes between opposing parties to effect a reconciliation; one who helps resolve a dispute between parties opposed to one another in some way
  - a. "since the fall" = the entrance of sin into the created order through Adam has "broken" the ability for human beings to *truly and faithfully* worship God (**see above**)
  - b. sin broke the *spiritual* relationship between God and man, such that humanity could no longer properly establish *in himself* the righteousness needed to restore that relationship *nor could he enter into the very presence of God* (**i.e.** banished from God's presence; **Genesis 3:24**)
2. so, God sent his only begotten Son into the world to act as a mediator (**1 Timothy 2:5f**)

"For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time."

  - a. he sent one who would (in incarnation) *perfectly understand* both sides (as one of them)
  - b. he sent one who would (in obedience) *perfectly offer* something from/to both sides
  - c. he sent one who would (in a finished work) *perfectly create* reconciliation between both sides
  - d. he sent one who would (in his ascension) *perfectly welcome* sinners into the presence of God
3. thus, this work of mediation not only satisfies the requirements of God *for righteousness*, it also establishes the *pathway* by which sinners (made righteous) can enter his eternal presence *and offer him a perfect worship*
  - a. because of the mediation of Christ, sinners are able to come *directly* into the presence of God
    1. Christ has gone *into the very presence of God* with his blood (**Hebrews 9:24**)

"For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf."
    2. **e.g.** the curtain in the Temple *symbolizes* that the "Holy of Holies" is now open (**Matt. 27:51**)
  - b. and, Christ sits upon his throne *making intercession* for us (**Hebrews 7:25**)
    1. **i.e.** he is beseeching the Father to continually recognize us as his own, and to treat us such
  - c. thus, Christ welcomes us to come before the Father and offer *true worship*, to enter into the very *Holy of Holies* and worship God in "*spirit and truth*" (**John 4:21-24; 14:6-7**)

"Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 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. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth'... Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.'"
4. **the true means of religious worship unto the Triune God is through Christ – the only true worship of God (in this fallen world) is through Christ as our mediator before the Father**
5. **only the one made holy in Christ by faith can truly worship the Living God, and such a person desires only to worship the True God, revealed to him as Father, Son, and Spirit**