

Matthew 4:10

Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.’” (NIV)

1. It is sometimes stated that since we are to worship only God, and, because we are also supposed to worship Jesus, therefore he must be God. That argument is not valid because, although there is a special worship that is reserved just for God, we can “worship” certain people as well. This is an issue of the heart. There is no special word for “worship” reserved only for God. The special worship due Him comes from the heart. In fact the entire temptation of Christ by the Devil proves that Jesus was not God. God cannot be tempted (James 1:13). Also, if Jesus were God, the Devil would never have asked Jesus to worship him. It was for desiring to be like God (and thus be worshiped like God) that the Devil was thrown out of heaven in the first place (Isa. 14:12-15), and it is unreasonable to think that the Devil would have believed that God could now be persuaded to worship him.

2. In the biblical culture, the act of worship was not directed only to God. It was very common to worship (*i.e.*, pay homage to) men of a higher status. This is hard to see in the English translations of the Bible. The translators usually translate the same Hebrew or Greek word as “worship” when it involves God, but as some other word, such as “bow before,” or “pay homage to,” when it involves men. Nevertheless, worship is clearly there in the Hebrew and Greek texts. For example:

- Lot “worshipped” the two strangers that came to Sodom (Gen. 19:1).
- Abraham “worshipped” the pagan leaders of the land in which he lived (Gen. 23:7).
- Jacob “worshipped” his older brother when they met after being apart for years (Gen. 33:3).
- Joseph had a dream that his parents and brothers “worshipped” him (Gen. 37:10).
- Joseph’s brothers “worshipped” him (Gen. 43:26).
- Joshua fell down and “worshipped” an angel (Josh. 5:14).
- Ruth “worshipped” Boaz (Ruth 2:10).
- David “worshipped” Jonathan (1 Sam. 20:41).
- Abigail “worshipped” David (1 Sam. 25:41).

The above list is just a small sampling of all the examples that could be drawn from Scripture. Checking the references in most Bibles will confirm what has already been pointed out—that the translators avoided the word “worship” when men are worshipping men, but used it in reference to worshipping God. These scriptures are more than enough proof that “worship” was a part of the culture, and a way of showing respect or reverence. Because of the theological stance that only God should be worshipped, translators have avoided the English word “worship,” in spite of the fact that it is clearly in the original text. We assert that not translating what is clearly in the text has created a false impression in the Christian community. It is very clear in the biblical text that men “worshipped” men.

There is a sense, of course, in which there is a very special worship (homage, allegiance, reverent love and devotion) to be given only to God, but there is no unique word that represents that special worship. Rather, it is a posture of the heart. Scripturally, this must be determined from context. Even words like *proskuneo*, which are almost always used of God, are occasionally used for showing respect to other men (Acts 10:25). And the word “serve” in Matthew 4:10 is *latreuo*, which is sometimes translated worship, but used of the worship of other things as well as of the true God (Acts 7:42 - *KJV*), “worship the host of heaven” and Romans 1:25, “served created things”). Thus, when Christ said, “You shall worship the Lord thy God and Him only shall you worship,” he was speaking of a special worship of God that comes from the heart, not using a special vocabulary word that is reserved for the worship of God only.

Understanding that in the Bible both God and men are worshipped forces us as readers to look, not at the specific word for “worship,” but rather at the heart of the one doing the worship. It explains why God rejects the worship of those whose hearts are really not with Him. It also explains why there are occasions in the Bible when men reject the worship of other men. In Acts 10:26, Peter asks Cornelius to stand up. In Revelation 19:10, an angel stops John from worshipping him. In these cases it is not the worship, *per se*, that was wrong, or it would have been wrong in all the other places throughout the Bible. In the aforementioned accounts, the one about to be worshipped saw that it was inappropriate or felt uncomfortable in the situation. Actually, the example of John in Revelation is another strong proof that men did worship others beside God. *If it were forbidden to worship anyone beside God, the great apostle John would never have even started to worship the angel.* The fact that he did so actually proves the point that others beside God were worshipped in the biblical culture.

It is clear why people fell down and worshipped Jesus while he walked the earth and performed great miracles: people loved him and respected him greatly. It is also clear why we are to worship him now—he has earned our love and our highest reverence. He died to set us free, and God has honored him by seating him at His own right hand above all other powers and authorities.

Broughton and Southgate, pp. 194 and 195

Dana, p. 21

Morgridge, pp. 46-52

Norton, pp. 447 and 448

Snedeker, pp. 389 and 390

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