

DEFINE DEVINE WORSHIP

The word “worship”, like many words in English can have a wide range of, sometimes confusing, meanings attached to it. Some people “worship” their morning coffee. The Greek word most often used in the New Testament with the concept of imputing holy awe—the worship of divinity—is *proskyneo*.

Consulting a Bible concordance will reveal it is used most often referring to the God of Abraham—Jehovah/Yahweh, or as Jesus called him, Father. But it is also used in different contexts. In fact, the first 3 citations of this word in the New Testament cover misdirected worship—as the context clearly shows.

WORSHIP WHO?

Herein lies the problem with the worship concept being applied to beings other than Father God. It is so easy to run roughshod over context. The Bible’s first use of this Greek word is in the worship of Jesus. But not worshiping him in any sense related to Abraham’s God but rather as an addition to a pantheon of demonic “deities”.

In one of the worst instances of ignoring context, most Christian traditions hold the appearance of the “Magi” as somehow a good thing for Jesus and Christians. The context clearly shows that this event was orchestrated by a force seeking an early death for the Christ at the hands of an evil king.

The Bible repeatedly condemns astrology and all the divinations related to it (Deuteronomy 18:10 et al.). Joseph and Mary would have easily seen the horror in that luciferous object guiding pagan sorcerers to their door to “worship” their special child (Matthew 2:2). Joseph didn’t take much convincing to flee when he heard the other shoe drop, being told by an angel that Herod was also wanting to “worship” their son in an even more awful way (the second misdirected use of “worship”, in Matthew 2:8).

The third similarly misdirected worship citation is in a revealing discourse Jesus has with the fallen angel, Lucifer himself—the obvious source of that luciferous object earlier in Jesus’ life. Satan tempts Jesus to “worship” him (Matthew 4:9).

.to whom the son of God quotes Deuteronomy 6:13 stating “worship Jehovah your God and serve Him only” (4th and first correct citation; Matthew 4:10). Our lord is here teaching and drawing a sharp line that all worship should/must be directed only toward Jehovah God. The word “only” meaning only. Jesus himself added the “only” which does not appear in the Deuteronomy text. Emphasizing this singular focus in worship would not be mandated by one who thought himself an exception to the rule.

WORSHIP JESUS?

So what about the other instances in the New Testament where Jesus is, rather, seems to be worshipped? Maybe the Bible speaks with a forked tongue (not!). Maybe the Athanasians¹ have some traction? Maybe one needs to read the context (this is the correct answer).

Some of the “worship Jesus” events occur when Jesus had just done something miraculous. Although scripture doesn’t record his rejection of these, that doesn’t make it right. In Acts 28 people call Paul a god when he does something miraculous. It is not recorded here he rejected that (although he did reject it in Acts 14). The scriptures at times don’t condemn things done that are still wrong. Another example, the Jerusalem church commune that resulted in starvation and poverty. Also the earlier example of sorcerers worshipping the Christ child. These weren’t condemned because the context would have clued the reader in to their error.

Similarly, context confutes Christ worship in the passages some, specifically Athanasian trinitarians, say propound Christ worship. The two most cited passages are Hebrews chapter 1 and Revelation chapter 5. Hebrews has the sentence: “Let all God’s angels worship Him.”(Hebrews 1:6) in recognition of God bringing His firstborn (His Christ, His Lamb) into the world. Immediately following the author states “He makes His angels winds, His servants flames of fire” (Hebrews 1:7).

Absent a trinity agenda, this verse would indicate the angelic servants proclaiming the worship of Jehovah for His unbelievable gift to humanity of the Christ. The

angelic host making the announcement with the intensity of wind driven fire— “a great company of the heavenly host praising God and saying ‘Glory to God in the highest. . .’” (Luke 2:14). This and the correlating context clearly support a major Biblical principle of worshipping only JHWH (Exodus 20:2). Not its opposite.

Moreover, the main message of Hebrews reveals layers of meaning accorded to Christ as high priest of the Church. The high priest whose job is to celebrate and sacramentalize the WAY to the Father and direct the worship of Him. The single role of every high priest, especially THE high priest, is to focus worship through sacrifice onto Jehovah. It is an unconscionable distortion of the role of high priest to short circuit worship onto himself.

ANGELIC ANSWER

The verse in the book of Revelation mentioned above, purportedly supporting conjoined worship of God’s Christ as part of a godhead, can be shown to accord with the rest of the book and the Bible using obvious context. Essentially all of the 23 usages of the *proskyneo* verb forms in Revelation have a specified object. Most, of course, relate to God—JHWH². Some to various manifestations of the antichrist.

Two references are episodes where the author, John, is so overwhelmed by events that he falls down to worship an angel. The angel promptly confronts John with the grievous error—and the only appropriate correction: “Worship God.” Tellingly, this occurs as twin references constituting a Hebrew format where repeating something signals high importance or clarification or emphasis or all of the above (Revelation 19:9-10 and 22:8-9).

John receives this discipline twice in the context of his authorship role: the role of prophet. And not just a prophet but a prophet of the testimony of Jesus. The text is “. . .you and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.’ For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” This text, in this context, would seem to be decisive and conclusive that all believers have a single focus of worship toward Jehovah Father God.

Thus, the context leaves no room for applying anything but a single direct object—God—to the single worship reference in Revelation lacking an immediate overt object. This being the Revelation 5:14 verse where the elders fell down and worshiped someone. Who did they worship? Both God and the son are accorded “blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever” in the previous verse. But the context leaves no doubt that the worshipers in that next verse were focused on directing their worship to the one true God alone.

IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Attend a typical Sunday evangelical church service. You’ll likely discover evangelicals don’t pray through (in the name of) Jesus. They pray to Jesus. The god they worship is Jesus. God’s perfect son whose role is to be our perfect model and teacher did his best to model and teach that we should pray to and worship his Father, his God (John 20:17), only.

As God’s perfect image, his perfect son is certainly, eminently and completely worthy of worship. . .so we shouldn’t fault our temptation to worship him. But since God made us able to think and learn we are obliged to see and worship the Father better because of the examples and teachings of the son. . .to his contemporaries and to ours. Make your worship holy. . .by worshipping the Holy One.

1. Athanasius (d.373) was an early church leader who had a seminal role in crafting the trinity dogma. Although probably not written by him, the Athanasian creed is widely and historically recognized to crystallize and define the dogma as he likely construed it. (numerous sources, most easily currently, *Wikipedia* article under his name)
2. JHWH is the 4 letter transliteration the Hebrew name for God in the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible), oftentimes pronounced Yahweh, or, more traditionally, Jehovah. (again, most easily referenced in the *Wikipedia* article) This name was considered too holy to pronounce or even think by ancient conservative Jews—so the actual text was often changed to a different, usually, an all capitals typesetting word, in English translations, most commonly, LORD. Some modern Messianic Jews have resumed

reading the Holy Name, Yahweh, when they read the thousands of occurrences in the Old Testament. The New Testament was written in Greek using the word *adonai* for Lord. This word lacks the specificity of what "lord" is being referenced. I presume this implies that God expects us to use context to understand if any particular reference meaning is YHWH. In practice, it introduces possible errors and lack of specificity especially in evangelical Trinitarian churches where Jesus is usually assumed to be the "lord" in question.