

Vital Supplement for Spiritual Vitality
A GLIMPSE INTO GLORY: GOD'S WORTHINESS (Part 3) ©
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Revelation 4:9-11

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I. INTRODUCTION:

When you are going about living your life, day-by-day, moment-by-moment, what do you find yourself offering God? Do you offer in your day's worship a gift you enjoy and figure God will also like it? We think our worship is so wonderful because we enjoyed it "soo" much. But just like a thoughtful gift one receives at Christmas, real worship involves knowing what is important to the Receiver, namely, the God of the Bible. In today's devotional we are going to consider God's worthiness by considering the *second* expression of worship we discover in Revelation 4:9-11. Afterwards, we will ask ourselves how to respond to this revelation of praise.

II. LAST TIME: Revelation 4:1-11:

But before we study this second expression of praise in Revelation 4, let us step back and review our two previous lessons. We began our study by examining John's description of the One sitting on the Throne in Revelation 4:1-3. We recognized His position as our sovereign God, His power as almighty, His person-whose appearance is described in gem-like colors (brilliant like a Jasper diamond and blood red like a sardius gemstone), and whose throne is encircled by a rainbow, emerald in appearance.

In our second devotional we directed our attention to Revelation 4: 4-11 where we learned certain truths about those who surround God in this future heavenly vision:

The 24 elders and the four living creatures continuously worship God. They do not cease. **They know their purpose.**

Their activity of worship is God-centered. No attention is drawn to them. There is no first person in their claims of worship. **They know what really counts.**

We observed their location; they are in God's presence. The 24 elders encircle the throne. They fall before Him. The four living creatures are in the midst and around the throne. If they are worshipping Him continuously, they never leave His presence. **They know where to be.**

The content of their worship is most biblical: they continuously bring attention to God and His holiness, eternity, and worthiness. **They know what to offer Him.**

We noted the disposition of the 24 elders: They fall down and they cast their crowns. Whether these crowns are crowns of rewards or rulership is debatable, what is significantly clear is that **they know who their God is and what to offer Him.**

But chapter 4 also gives us a central truth about Him in view of the beings that surround Him. All they do is reflect who He is for He alone is worthy of their worship. Ever in His presence they glorify the One sitting on the throne. Do we?

We also discovered that first expression of praise was given by the Four Living Creatures. Here they proclaimed His holiness, His omnipotence, and His eternity in Revelation 4:8.

Lastly, we briefly explored some applications from the apostle's command in 1 Peter 1:1:15-16. We considered how we might grow in holiness in view of everyday living. First, cultivate the desire to be a holy man or woman of God. Second, in your daily decision-making or moment-by-moment decisions you make, seek to think as God thinks and will as God wills. In other words, continually ask yourself in view of the decision you are about to make, "God, what will give you the most glory?" Third, be resolved never to do anything which you would be afraid to do if it were the last hour of your life before God's presence. Fourth, develop an intimacy with God with utmost reverence in mind. Fifth, never tolerate activities that are not in keeping with our holy, loving God. And lastly, remember that authentic holiness points people to Jesus Christ.

III. THIS TIME: Revelation 4:9-11:

9 Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, 10 the twenty four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne

and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: 11 “You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by your will they exist and were created.”

If I could summarize this expression of worship in one statement I would say the following: **This tribute of praise declares God is worthy to receive power, honor, and glory because He is the Creator and the Sustainer.**

The doxology or praise in verse 8, **“Holy holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who and is and is to come”** is explained as giving God **“glory, honor, and thanksgiving”** in verse 9. The word **“give”** in verse 9 should not be understood in the sense of imparting to God qualities that He does not already possess. These are characteristics inherent in Him. In response to the worship by the Four Living Creatures, the 24 elders offer a four-fold response:

First, they fall (*pasountai*) down before the One sitting on the throne who exercises all power, rule, and dominion. Whenever the Living Creatures give glory, the elders fall. To fall down is a proper response to the majesty of God: to worship is appropriate for his eternal being. “It is certainly possible to picture the praise of the living creatures and the response of the elders as taking place at repeated intervals of great significance throughout Revelation.”¹ They prostrate themselves in worship before the one who is eternal. Here they alone fall before God who sits upon the throne. Interestingly, this is the first of six times in the Book of Revelation that the elders prostrate themselves before God or the Lamb (5:8, 14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4). Three times they are joined by the four living creatures (5:8; 7:11; 19:4) and once by all the angels (7:11).² Thus, they fall before God who sits on the throne. They engage every aspect of their being in their worship to Him. What a display of humility as they direct their undivided adoration to the eternal God!

Second, they worship Him. The word **“worship”** originally involved the idea of prostrating oneself before deity to kiss his feet or the hem of his garment. As an act of reverence and respect it was not uncommon in the East. Just as vassal kings removed their crowns

¹ R. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 126.

² Robert Thomas, *Revelation*, 1:365.

when coming into the presence of their emperor, these kings lay their crowns before God.³ I would define worship here in this passage as **“worthship.”**

Third, they cast their crowns before Him. They give no indication of selfishness. Rather, they voluntarily surrender by casting their crowns before throne. What a demonstration that all glory belongs to Him. Lenski makes an interesting comment regarding the One sitting on the throne: “He wears no crown, for no mission of victory, no act of victorious enthronement, no triumph pertains to Him whose majesty as the Creator places him and his throne above and beyond anything of this kind.”⁴

And fourth, they worship Him by saying: “You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by your will they exist and were created.” You are worthy, O Lord To receive glory and honor and power!

The praise of the elders differs from that of the living creatures in two ways: (1) The praise of the elders is addressed directly to God; (2) The praise of the elders is based on his work in creation rather than his divine perfections.

The word **“worthy”** [*axios*] is an adjective that carries the idea of (1) weighing, having weight, having the weight of another thing of like value, worth as much; (2) befitting, congruous, corresponding to a thing; (3) of one who has merited anything worthy, whether in good and a bad sense.⁶ Interestingly, the phrase, **“you are worthy”** was used in the political language of the day on such occasions as when the emperor marched in triumphal procession. In the ultimate sense, however, is to attribute worthiness to anyone else than the one upon the throne is blasphemous (Mounce).

The words, **“glory”**, **“honor”**, and **“power”** focuses upon God’s creative power. As the song of the living beings in Revelation 4:8 has for its theme the holiness, omnipotence, and eternity of God, aspects of his infinite-person, this verse revolves about the theme of God’s glory as reflected in his creation.

³ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 126.

⁴ Lenski, *Interpretation of Revelation*, 188.

This leads us to the next statement:

“For you created all things, and by your will they exist and were created.” He is worthy because in accordance with his will all things *“were created and have their being.”* We might re-translate it and say, *“they were and they were created.”* “This suggests that all things that are, existed first in the eternal will of God and through his will came into actual being at his appointed time.”⁵ Moreover, “The song accumulates emphasis on God’s creative work through this threefold statement that he did it.”⁶

The particular reason for the declaration of God’s worthiness is because of God’s creative work. Whereas the first expression offered by the 4 living creatures praised God for his holiness, the 24 elders praise him for his worthiness. He is worthy to receive such adulation because he sovereignly created everything that exists and by his will allows them to continue to exist. This reminds me of God’s first speech to Job when God finally breaks his silence and speaks to Job, rhetorically asking him more than 70 questions to show Job’s ignorance and God’s greatness in Job 38.

In his classic work, *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer state:

What matters supremely, therefore, is not, in the last analysis, the fact that I know God, but the larger fact which underlies it—that He knows me. I am graven on the palms of His hands. I am never out of His mind. All my knowledge of Him depends on His sustained initiative in knowing me. I know Him because he first knew me, and continues to know me. He knows me as a friend, one who loves me; and there is no moment when His eye is off me, or His attention distracted from me, and no moment, therefore, when His care falters. This is momentous knowledge. There is unspeakable comfort... in knowing that God is constantly taking knowledge of me in love and watching over me for my good. There is tremendous relief in knowing that His love is utterly realistic, based at every point on prior knowledge of the worst about me, so that no discovery now can disillusion Him about me, in the way I am so often

⁵ Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 127.

⁶ Thomas, *Revelation*, 1:368.

disillusioned about myself, and quench His determination to bless me.”

IV. HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND TO THIS REVELATION?

If worthiness is giving what is due God, what are you offering Him in daily worship? Are you giving God something meaningless like a water gauge a husband gave his wife for Christmas? Do you offer God what you enjoy and figure God will like it? Once again, like a thoughtful gift, real worship means knowing what is important to the receiver. What do you offer Him in your worship? Does that truly express His worthiness? When do you offer such worship? Does that truly express His worthiness? Why do you even offer worship?

I listened to the story of a pastor who went to minister in Africa. After being there for a while he turned to God in prayer-absolutely angry at Him. He said I came to preach the Good News of Salvation, to see these dear children be spared from the fury of hell and damnation. But it turns out that they aren’t ignorant of your presence. Rather, they refuse to acknowledge your presence. Why? Why would you send me here to be in the company of rebellious savages who know you exist but refuse to bow to you? In that moment of prayer he came to horrible realization: “To show you, preacher and pastor, that you are robbing me of my glory.” See, this pastor went to Africa for his own sake, maybe for the sake of others, but not for the glory of God.

Who do we think we are kidding? When we are not offering him our utmost best, offering God the worthiness that is due Him, we are actually saying to Him, “God you are not worthy enough to receive my utmost.” We know from the story of Cain and Abel that God doesn’t like acts of selfish worship cloaked in unselfish appearances.

But then the question becomes, **“How can we offer Him our very best?”** Surely, because of the residual effects of our sin nature, every act we do is tainted in some way with selfish motives or intentions. On the surface, that seems right. (a) We are very selfish creatures. (b) There is this warring within, there is this old man, and (c) there are thousands of past experiences in our own lives to which we can appeal to demonstrate that though our actions appeared to be God-honoring, but if the truth be fully known, our motives were indeed selfish. If it is inevitable that at the core of every action is a selfish motive, even in those acts that appear to be most noble, then I do not see how any

“reward” will survive the exposing fire at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:10-15; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:9-10; 2 John 8). What we discover in that passage is that **every selfish act will be wood, stubble, & hay**. Thus, while I am not advocating perfectionism, I do believe it is possible to offer our very best to Him with God-honoring motives, when we are controlled by the Holy Spirit, walking dependently, step-by-step in His strength, bearing the fruit of the Spirit.

Having said it is possible to offer Him our very best because of the Holy Spirit’s ministry(s) in our lives when we “abide” in fellowship with our living God, let us look again at the passage, and I want you to notice two qualities of worship that are expressed in this praise.

Humility and submission: When these high orders [24 elders] sing their praises to the One sitting on the throne, they fall before him and relinquish all their honor to him. When they fall down, they offer *humility*. They are not clinging to their own bit of honor. Nothing is reserved for them; nothing is held back. When they cast their crowns, they offer submission. They are not clinging to even one “smidgen” of power, no matter how well deserved it may be. All they have that is worthy of self-recognition is laid before the throne of God. To be sure, the positions they occupy and the authority or rewards they have are indeed blessings. They are privileged, blessed to occupy these thrones that encircle God’s throne and to wear crowns of ruler-ship or rewards. But, in their worship of God, do you see them clinging to their own bit of honor and power, no matter how well deserved it may be? Do you see any reservation as they worship him? No, as they prostrate themselves we see every ounce of energy is directed to God. **They are offering Him their utmost.** Are they distracted in any way in their worship? Are they looking back at John as they worship him? Not one of them said, “I can’t worship right now because John is here. I don’t see them asking in their praise to God, “You know, I wonder what this John is doing up here? I don’t see them saying, “The four living creatures with all their eyes around and within are giving me the creeps.” No, **they are focused.** Do you see any embarrassment in their worship? Do they even care who sees them? They don’t think it is embarrassing to drop to their knees and bow their face to the floor.

Rather than be self-conscious, they know who they are worshipping. Do you see any bit of selfish motive? Is there anything here that says, “what about me?” Are they seeking to gain any bit of the glory, to fulfill their personal needs and wishes?

No, their worship of God is their identity. Is yours? If anything less than my very best is what expresses His worthiness, then what are steps I can take to offer my utmost in worship? In answering this question I am going to start with are affections, consider our appetites, then our thinking, and lastly, our surroundings. By approaching this holistically, we may better address this subject of how we might be better in offering our utmost to Him in how we live.

Beginning with our affections (the desires of our heart): **1.** *Pray to God every day that you will whole heartily seek to honor His name.* **2.** *Pray to God every day that you will authentically find joy in worshipping Him.”* **3.** *Pray to God every day that He will bind your heart to Himself. Is* **4.** *Regularly examine the desires of your heart and see whether they express the worthiness that is due Him. Let me put it this way, “What do you want out of life?” Does what you want reflect the worship that is due Him with the remaining breath you have. Like Dr. Ken Hanna, a senior professor of Bible Exposition, at Dallas Theological Seminary states:*

We can’t expect worship to flow from our lips on the Lord’s Day if we keep it dammed in our hearts throughout the week. The waters of worship should never stop flowing from our heart, for God is always God and always worthy of worship. But the flow of worship should be channeled and distilled at least daily into a distinct worship experience.”

Moving from our affections to our appetites: **5.** *Quit nibbling at the table of the world!* John Piper puts it this way:

If you don’t feel strong desires for the manifestation of the glory of God, it is not because you have drunk deeply and are satisfied. It is because you have nibbled so long at the table of the world. Your soul is stuffed with small things, and there is no room for the great. God did not create you for this? There is an appetite for God. And it can be awakened. I invite you to turn from the dulling effects of food and the dangers of idolatry and to say with some simple fast: “This much, O God, I want you.”⁷

⁷ John Piper, *When I Don’t Desire God: How to Fight for Joy*, 172.

Moving from our appetites to our thinking: 6. *Meditate on God's Instructions:*" John 17:17; Romans 12:1-2; First Timothy 3:16-17 [Please meditate upon these passages].

Moving from our thinking to our surroundings: 7. Give God your very best (Mark 14:3-8)! There is really something beautiful when you give back to God what He has given to you. In that moment, when you give back the good and perfect gifts God has given you, He is worshipped...for you are willing to give up for the glory of God. Consider the anointing of Jesus by Mary in **Mark 14:3-8**. Though you may not be able to pour costly perfume on Jesus' feet, in one sense you actually do when you sincerely love others, meeting the practical needs of others- even if that means it will demand self-surrender (cf. 1 John 3:16-17).

8. *Determine what places, activities, and thoughts prompt you to worship.* Incorporate those elements into your daily and weekly life. Devote quality time to them. Similarly, identify and avoid the things that hinder meaningful worship. We must not forget, however, that God expects us to worship privately ...We minimize our joy when we neglect the daily worship of God in private. It is one of the great blessings of life that God does not limit our access to Him and enjoyment of His presence to one day per week! Daily strength, guidance, and encouragement are available to us. An invitation to grow in intimacy with Jesus Christ Himself is open every day. ...To worship God throughout a lifetime requires discipline. Without discipline, our worship of God will be thin and inconsistent. When I say that worship is focusing on and responding to God, I hope to convey my conviction that true worship is always covered with heart prints. Worship can't be diagramed or calculated, for it is the response of a heart in love with God. And yet, we also must be able to think of worship as a Discipline, a Discipline that must be cultivated just as all relationships must be to remain healthy and grow.¹⁶ **9.** *Lastly, seek to see what few only take time to see: The glory of God revealed in creation: See Psalm 92:4; Psalm 19:1-4.* Let me illustrate this last point by sharing a story from C. S. Lewis' *God in the Dock*:

I was standing today in the dark tool shed. The sun was shining outside and through the crack at the top of the door there came a sun-beam. From where I stood that beam of light, with the specks of dust floating in it, was the most striking thing in the place. Everything else was almost pitched-black. I was seeing

the beam, not seeing things by it. Then I moved so that the beam fell on my eyes. Instantly the whole previous picture vanished. I saw no tool shed, and (above all) no beam. Instead, I saw, framed in the irregular cranny at the top of the door, green leaves moving on the branches of a tree outside and beyond that, 90 odd million miles away, the sun. **Looking along** [mine bold] the beam, and **looking at** [mine bold] the beam are very different experiences.⁸

See, here is a man was able to see what few see! Ladies and gentlemen: As you go about living your daily life, consistently and regularly take a moment, gaze upon some aspect of God's creativity, and allow that display of glory prompt you to worship Him, giving Him what is appropriately due. Offer Him your utmost in the choices you make, the values you embrace, and the pleasures you pursue.

⁸ C. S. Lewis, "Meditation in a Tool Shed" in *God in the Dock*, 212.