Let us consider the subject “Worship in the Beauty of Holiness” based on the Scripture text, 1 Chronicles 16:29 which says: “Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.” It is a portion of David’s thanksgiving psalm (1 Chronicles 16:8-36) on the occasion of bringing back the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 16:1-2).

As with other verses in the Scriptures where we read the phrase “worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness”, 1 Chronicles 16:29 is one important scriptural guideline on worship. Looking closely at our text, there are three things for us to take note of: (1) the command to worship, (2) the object of worship and (3) the manner of worship.

Firstly, the command to worship. We are told to worship. Interestingly, our text sheds light on what worship is all about as the first part of it says: “Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name.” Worship is our highest duty and it is giving and ascribing glory and reverence unto God. It continues to tell us of one element of worship, that is, “bring an offering, and come before him”. Yes, worship is coming before God’s presence, bringing with us our offering and sacrifices of thanksgiving.

Secondly, the object of worship. The second part of the verse reads: “worship the LORD.” We are to worship the Lord and Him only! The Lord is to be the one and only object of our worship.
Thirdly, the manner of worship, which shall be our main subject for this article. We are told to “worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness”. This phrase occurs more than once in the Bible. We read in Psalm 29:2: “Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.” Psalm 96:9 – “O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth.”

At the heart of this call to worship are the right approach and right attitude in worship. These are two important principles that must be upheld if we are to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

The right approach: worship must be consistent with the character of God

Since worship is ascribing glory, giving honour and adoration to God, the worshipper must bear in mind the character of God. This is clearly emphasised on the occasion when Jesus told the Samaritan woman, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). From here, we learn that our worship must be consistent with the character of God.

One of the attributes of God is His holiness. We read of the prophet Isaiah’s vision of the seraphims crying one to another: “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isaiah 6:3). And in the vision of John in Revelation 4:8: “And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.” God is a holy God and therefore, they that worship him must worship him in the beauty of holiness.

As we think about it, there is nothing more beautiful than holiness, and we know that God is infinitely holy. Therefore, our worship ought also to be characterized by holiness, that is, the beauty of holiness. And that would imply:

(1) Worship must not be associated with anything that is an affront to God’s holiness.

(2) Worship must be totally free from anything that is offensive to or contradicts the character of God.

It is so sad that many of today’s worship, which are rather self-styled and presumptuous, worldly and carnal (even sensual) do not hold up to this biblical standard of worship. Instead of worship in the beauty of holiness, it has degenerated into plain worldliness. Surely it is not pleasing, neither acceptable nor glorifying unto God.
A holy God must be approached in holiness. “O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth” (Psalm 96:9). Notice that the psalmist describes the beauty of the Lord in His holiness and then continues to describe the manner of approaching the Lord in worship — “fear before him”. Here we are taught that to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness is to approach Him with reverential fear. We read in Psalm 5:7 – “But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple.” Likewise, Psalm 22:23 says: “Ye that fear the LORD, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel.”

In the vision of Isaiah, he saw angels having 6 wings – 2 wings covering their face and 2 wings covering their feet, which is a gesture of their reverence before the majesty of the Lord in the beauty of holiness. In John’s vision in Revelation 4, together with the four beasts crying “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty”, “four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power” (Revelation 4:8, 10-11).

As God is a thrice-holy God, our worship of Him ought to be a holy and solemn activity that must be done in decency and in order, in reverence and in awe, as well as in the beauty of holiness.

The right attitude: the worshipper must conform to the character of God

Not only must our worship be consistent with the character of God, the worshipper must conform to the very character of God. In the O.T. (especially in Leviticus), we read often of this command: “Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy.” 1 Peter 1:15-16 – “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.” It is God's will for His people to be holy in all manner of conduct, even in their worship.

The psalmist thought about it in Psalm 24: “Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place?” (v. 3). The psalmist was contemplating: “Whom will God admit as an acceptable worshipper?”

Herein lies the answer in verse 4: “He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully”, which is further elaborated in Psalm 15.

The prophet, Isaiah, in seeing a vision of the Holy God surrounded by angels crying: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty”, was moved to confess: “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell
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in the midst of a people of unclean lips…” (Isaiah 6:5). Isaiah was mindful of his own standing before God and knew very well that sin is one great affront to the character of the thrice-holy God and so he could only say: “Woe is me!” How about us? Do we have that sensitivity each time we come before God in worship? Remember, in worship we are in His very presence.

God’s holiness demands that we must come to worship Him in the beauty of holiness. It is not to be taken lightly, instead it should be a matter of concern to everyone who is committed to worship the Lord. So if we approach God in worship without holiness, then there is no beauty in worship but rather the ugliness of sin.

Perhaps, our greatest concern now would be this – “What is the ‘beauty of holiness’?” If we think of God’s beauty of holiness, we would think of God in the splendour of His infinite purity, in all His transcendent awesome glory.

Speaking of the same pertaining to man, it would be that quality or the kind of life that is evidenced by godliness, purity and consecration unto God. It is the one beauty that God wants to see among His people every time they come before Him in worship. It is not that God will not be delighted when we come dressed up appropriately for worship but it is the beauty of our inward purity as evidenced by outward sanctity, i.e. our personal holiness and sanctification that pleases Him most!

I believe the Apostle Paul had this in mind when he wrote Romans 12:1-2: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

**Conclusion**

Worship is the very purpose of our existence — “the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.” Someone once said that “to worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God; to feed the mind with the truth of God; and to devote the will to the purpose of God”.

Worship in the beauty of holiness is a must, for that we would not be guilty of hypocritical or irreverent worship. We must worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, for without holiness no man can see the Lord.