

DOES IT MATTER HOW WE WORSHIP GOD?

by Douglas W. Hill

Understanding how God communicates through His word (commands, examples, necessary inference) helps us to correctly understand & submit to what God wants. Also, it leads to unity with others who correctly submit to God. Let us see how this works by asking the question: *Does it matter how we worship God?*

In John 4, Jesus passed through Samaria. Jesus took this occasion as an opportunity to teach the Samaritan woman who He is (4:10). She asked Jesus about worship, saying: "Our fathers worship in this mountain; and ye (the Jews) say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." She was asking Jesus who was right, the Samaritans or the Jews. Jesus replied, "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when neither in this mountain (Mount Gerizim), nor in Jerusalem shall ye worship the Father. Ye worship **that which ye know not**: we worship **that which we know**; for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour cometh, and **now is**, when the **true** worshippers shall worship the Father **in spirit and truth**: for **such doth the Father** seek to be his worshippers. God is spirit: and they that worship him **must** worship in spirit and in truth." (4:21-24)

What does this mean? This means that the as Samaritans worshipped according to their way, **it was not according to**

knowledge of God's revealed will (4:22). The Jews worshipped in the place **that was appointed by God** under the Old Testament Law (4:22). Yet, even though Jerusalem was the authorized place for worship up until that time, the time "now is" when things would change. No longer would worship be done in a particular place (like a physical temple at Jerusalem), but **in spirit and in truth**. This is the kind of worshiper that **God seeks** and is pleased with. Therefore, Jesus said we **must** worship in this manner. No other way is now acceptable.

At this point, the question of our study must change. No longer should we ask, "Does it matter how I worship?" **Jesus said it does matter**. The question should now be, "*What is worship in spirit and in truth?*"

IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH - "In spirit" refers to our inward self, our spiritual man. There is an outward man and an inward man (2 Corinthians 4:16). Loving and worshipping God with our inward man or spirit means our thoughts, our intentions, our will, our emotions, and our mind (Matt. 22:37). Also, "in truth" means "according to God's word." For, Jesus himself said that God's word is truth (John 17:17). What we see, then, is that our **heart** must be right and sincere; and also **our actions** in worship must be in the way that God's word directs. Remember, that this is what pleases God. We have looked at the Bible, not the opinions of men.

PRAYER - What do we see in the New Testament that is part of worship? How does it fit with "in spirit and truth"? First, we see that Christians worshipped God by praying together (Acts 12:5). James tells us that we must pray "**in faith**, nothing doubting" (James 1:6-8). That is, we must trust in God that He hears us, and answers us in harmony with His will for us. If we doubt this, then our faith is lacking. We are also to pray "**according to His will**" (1 John 5:14). Our prayers cannot be selfish or self-centered. We must pray for things that are in harmony with what God teaches and desires for us. For example, if you pray that the Lord will help you to see clearly what pleases Him, and you really mean it, you should have every confidence that God will answer you. The only question will be, will you accept it when He shows it to you?

THE LORD'S SUPPER - We read in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 that Christians were to take of the Lord's Supper. This "supper" is a memorial and reminder of what Jesus did in dying for us (11:23-26). It is a time to think about why Jesus died and how we should be living (11:27-32). Our spirit is involved as we sincerely think on Christ and examine ourselves to see if we are being faithful. It is according to truth, in that it is to be a memorial meal, not a common meal (11:24, 25). The purpose of this was not to fill the stomach (11:22, 34). To change one part or another of this is to worship without our spirit or without the truth. Also, we see that this was done on the first day of the week (Sunday) (Acts 20:7). To do this on any other day would

not be according to truth, even if we did it sincerely.

SINGING - We also read that God wants Christians to sing spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19-20). This is not common music or secular songs. This does not say that we may use whatever kind of music we like. What Ephesians 5 tells us is that **God is pleased** with us when we **sing spiritual songs from our hearts** to the Lord. Any other kind of music (even if we do it sincerely "to the Lord") would not be according to truth, even if we did it earnestly. If, for example, you could find a New Testament passage, which shows that God is pleased when we worship with musical instruments, then it would be something we knew pleased Him. But, since we only find N.T. worship as singing, then **we must follow what we know to be truth** and not try to speculate on what "might" please Him.

We must worship in spirit AND in truth. Worshiping God in spirit but without truth is worthless. Likewise, worship in truth without the spirit is empty. Both elements must be present to please God. Jesus plainly said that worship that is without the heart and without truth is "vain" or "empty" (Matt. 15:8-9). **To change what we know the Bible says for what men want does not please God** (Matt. 15:1-6).

STUDY - Next, we see that the Bible shows Christians gathering together to study God's word. You may not think of this as worship, but it is, for the Bible is the mind of God revealed (1 Corinthians 2:9-

13). We show thankfulness, reverence and awe (from our spirit) to God (Heb. 12:18) when we give effort to know His will for us (the truth). The Christians of the first century "continued steadfastly" in the teaching (Acts 2:42) and preaching (Acts 5:42) and the "service of the word" (Acts 5:4). Study is essential because it is the very means by which we gain and maintain faith in Christ (Romans 10:17).

GIVING - Finally, we see that the saints gave as they had prospered (1 Cor. 16:1-2). This was done only once a week (Sundays), not every day. This was not a tithe. There was no contract to sign saying how much you would give. There were no bake sales, benefit suppers, car washes or business ventures. The work of the local church was funded solely by the free-will offerings of its members, on the first day of every week (1 Cor. 16:2). The fact that it is as we "have purposed in our hearts" (2 Cor. 9:7), shows that our spirit is involved. Please also keep in mind this plain truth: You can read in your Bible about raising money on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:2). So, we all know and can all agree that doing it this way is **in truth**. To speculate about other ways or days to raise money is to walk by man's wisdom, rather than by faith in God and His word.

CONCLUSION - Friends, it does matter how we worship God. Our **spirit** must be involved in the sincere, earnest, and purposeful worship unto our God and Savior. **Truth** must guide our sincerity and behavior so that we do the things we know that God is pleased with. Otherwise, we

can end up being like the Samaritans, who worshipped "that which they knew not" (John 4:22). Or even like the Jews whose hearts were far from God (Matt. 15:8-9).

Are you looking for a church that follows the simple, but very meaningful examples of worship in the New Testament? Please visit with us and see whether we measure up to the standard of God's word by worshipping both "in spirit and in truth."

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(John 4:24)**