

ACCEPTABLE INDIVIDUAL WORSHIP

Lesson 6 Worship of God in Spirit John 4:19-24

“The minister tells me I should worship the one, true and living God as He is manifested in Christ and revealed in Scripture, but honestly, I am as dry as a bone in my spiritual life. Intellectually I grasp what the preacher is saying but this deep sense of worship he talks about is not my own experience. What can I do to get a cool breeze from heaven so that a vital spiritual life can be restored to me?” Perhaps you have asked yourself these questions. If so, I would like to suggest to you that one of the keys to a vital spiritual life is to understand what it means to “worship in spirit.” This must be an important concept because Christ, in His conversation with the Samaritan woman, stated twice that true worshipers must worship God “in spirit and in truth.”

“Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24).

The Samaritan woman had an outward form of worship but she had no personal relationship with God. The God she worshiped could not change her life because she had Him localized in a temple. Her God was a God of her imagination and she worshiped only when she was around or in the temple. She had no concept of a personal God who was always with her and who met her deepest spiritual needs. She was sincere in her religion but she was sincerely wrong. In her conversation with Christ, this woman referred to two different places of worship – Mount Gerizim in Samaria and Mount Moriah in Jerusalem.

“Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.” Jesus declared, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem” (John 4:19-21).

She always thought of worship in terms of a temple site. Christ’s point in this conversation was that worship would no longer be in terms of a place, a piece of geography or a temple, but it would be “in spirit and in truth.”

Mount Gerizim in Samaria and Mount Moriah in Jerusalem represent two kinds of worship both of which are not acceptable to God because neither one is “in spirit and truth.” Mount Gerizim worship represents a sincere worship on the human level but not at all based on the truth, for the Samaritans rejected all the Old Testament except the five books of Moses. They had “spirit” but not “truth.” The Samaritans had their own temple, priesthood and sacrificial system. When their temple was destroyed they carried on their

worship for years. They were sincere, earnest and committed to their religion but their religion was not based on truth.

Mount Moriah worship, on the other hand, represents the possession of truth without sincerity. The Jews had the truth of the Old Testament and went through the external forms of worship as God commanded them. They had the objective truth but lacked subjective experience and reality of the truth. They had “truth” but no “spirit.” They prayed, fasted, went to the temple, offered sacrifices, gave money and went through the external forms of religion, but Christ condemned them for their insincerity and hypocrisy. **“This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far away from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men” (Matt. 15:8-9).** The Jews had head knowledge of truth but no heart for God.

In the words, “worship in spirit” Christ attempted to correct any false teaching that men can have truth without reality or head facts without heart response and offer up acceptable worship to God. Worship must be from the total man - mind, will and emotions. The words “in spirit” are given by Christ so that Christians will be on guard about falling into dead orthodoxy, where Christians have an open Bible or a doctrinal creed but are cold, lifeless and powerless in their lives. The words “in spirit” are given to warn Christians about the dangers of intellectualism, hypocrisy, formalism and ritual in worship. God wants His people to experience Him and to have warm, glowing hearts while being committed to the truth.

WORSHIP IN A NEW SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

In the words “worship the Father in spirit,” Christ made it clear that since He has come in His first advent, worship will take on a new dimension. The Old Testament physical kind of worship will pass off the scene and something new, fresh and dynamic will replace this physical kind of worship. Worship in the Old Testament was centered on a physical temple, priesthood and animal sacrifices. These were types and shadows pointing forward to the Messiah, Jesus Christ the Lord who would come. Since Christ has come all the Old Testament types have been fulfilled in Christ and the Church. **“The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves” (Heb. 10:1).** Old Covenant worship has been replaced by New Covenant worship, and New Covenant worship centers around Jesus Christ. At the heart of New Covenant worship is worship in “spirit and truth.”

Acceptable worship can only come as we rid ourselves of all worldly forms of worship and spiritually worship God “in spirit,” for the New Testament clearly states that all worship is to be done in a new spiritual dimension. The true church of Jesus Christ has its temple, its sacrifices, its priesthood and its worship, but these are found primarily in the spiritual realm not the physical.

The Individual Christian is Spiritually Circumcised. **“For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reasons for such**

confidence” (Phil. 3:3). Physical circumcision in the Old Testament was a sign that one belonged to the covenant. In the New Testament, every Christian has been spiritually circumcised and is part of the Covenant of Grace. Because of spiritual circumcision of the heart each Christian is a true worshipper of God.

The Individual Christian is a Spiritual Temple

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

God is not dwelling in buildings any longer. He, through the Holy Spirit, is indwelling every true believer in Jesus Christ, and the individual Christian has become the temple of God. God dwells in spiritual temples, His people, and as temples of God, Christians are to be holy sanctuaries unto the Lord God. How often people in ignorance will pray, “It is good to be gathered in the house of God on this Lord’s Day,” referring to the church building. Or they will talk about a church building as a “sanctuary” as if there was something holy and mystical about a building. God is not in brick and mortar and glass; He is in people who have received His Son, Jesus Christ. The physical temple is destroyed. God now dwells in spiritual temples and these spiritual temples are to be dedicated to God and used for His holy service.

One time a woman came out of the morning service all huffy and puffy and said to the preacher, “Did you see that young boy chewing gum in the sanctuary this morning?” The minister knew the boy was a believer and the preacher smiled and said, “Lady, I have news for you. The sanctuary was chewing the gum!”

The Individual Christian is a Spiritual Priest

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Pet. 2:9).

The Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament has been done away with forever. Since Christ has come, every Christian is his own priest before God. He can represent himself before God in prayer and offer up his own spiritual sacrifices to the Father through his Great High Priest, Jesus Christ.

The great cry of Martin Luther in the Reformation was the universal priesthood of all believers. He opposed the Roman Catholic concept of a literal, physical priesthood on earth. Luther was right and we should still oppose this concept even today. God wants to set men free, not put them in bondage by placing them back under a system that God said has been done away with forever.

The Individual Christian Offers Spiritual Sacrifices.

“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased” (Heb. 13:15-16).

As a self-sustaining believer-priest, each Christian is to offer spiritual sacrifices of praise, good works and finances. Real worship involves praise, performance and purse. Part of our worship is to praise God with thanksgiving for His person and His covenant of mercy towards us. Our worship involves good works towards our brothers in Christ and our unsaved neighbors.

A definite part of our worship to God is the liberal giving of our monies to the Lord’s work. When we do not give tithes and offerings, we are robbing God of proper worship that is rightfully His. **“Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’ ‘In tithes and offerings’” (Mal. 3:8).** No Christian is fully worshipping God until he is making these spiritual sacrifices to God.

The Individual Christian Offers Up Spiritual Worship.

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship” (Rom. 12:1).

The presentation of the life to God is an act of spiritual worship. Every Christian is to be a living sacrifice. In the KJV the presentation of the body as a “living sacrifice” is said to be the Christian’s “spiritual act of worship.” Do you want to worship God? Then present your life to Him. The highest form of worship is a life dedicated to God. Real worship is nothing less than an obedient life. Unless we are daily presenting our lives to God, we are not offering up acceptable worship. A life committed to God is a living, spiritual sacrifice. It is much more difficult to live for God than to die for Him. Martyrdom would be simple compared to living everyday for the one, true and living God as He is manifested in Christ and revealed in Scripture. We have not really worshipped until our bodies are presented to God.

WORSHIP IN A NEW SPIRITUAL POWER

The New Testament teaches that as spiritual temples the Holy Spirit permanently indwells the true believer in Jesus Christ. With the coming of Christ, there is a new manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians. The very power of God resides within every believer. It is the Holy Spirit who energizes God’s people in the New Testament. **“For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit . . .” (Phil. 3:3).** Worship is to be offered to the Father, through the Son in the energizing power of the Holy Spirit.

When Christ said to the Samaritan woman that worship was to be “in spirit,” He undoubtedly had in mind man’s human spirit, but it is the Holy Spirit who energizes the human spirit, so this has caused some commentators to think Christ was indirectly

speaking about the Holy Spirit and directly speaking about the human spirit. A.W. Tozer says,

“Only the Holy Spirit can enable a fallen man to worship God acceptably. The Church has been propagated by the Holy Spirit, so we can only worship in the Spirit, we can only pray in the Spirit, and we can only preach effectively in the Spirit, and what we do must be done by the power of the Spirit.” (*Worship: The Missing Jewel*)

The Holy Spirit becomes the power for the Christian to worship God when offering up his spiritual sacrifices of his person, praise, performance and purse. Christians are told specifically to pray in the Holy Spirit **“But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life” (Jude 20-21)**. Christians are exhorted to be filled or controlled by the Spirit. **“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18)**. They are also commanded to live (walk) in the Spirit. **“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (Gal. 5:16)**. The whole purpose of the Holy Spirit’s work is to manifest Christ to the Christian, and Christ in turn takes the Christian to the Father. The Holy Spirit has come to glorify Christ.

“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you” (John 16:13-14).

Beware of any Christian or Christian organization that exalts the Holy Spirit above Christ. The Spirit’s task is to make Christ real to the Christian. If one is occupied with Christ, the Holy Spirit will energize him.

The relationship of the Holy Spirit to Christ can be compared to a spotlight on an actor when on stage. The purpose of the spotlight is to focus attention on the actor. Without the spotlight no one would see the actor. The Holy Spirit shines His light on the person of Christ so we can see Christ. The Holy Spirit’s work is to put Christ in the spotlight in the life of the believer.

Christians need the work of the Holy Spirit in order to worship acceptably and effectively. Without spiritual assistance from God we cannot worship God aright. If we feel our souls are dry as a parched desert, then let us fall on our faces before God and cry out for God to have His Holy Spirit revive us. We can say as the Psalmist, **“Revive us, and we will call on your name” (Psa. 80:18)**.

WORSHIP IN A NEW SPIRITUAL ATTITUDE

When Christ told the Samaritan woman that worship was to be “in spirit,” He was most certainly talking about the fact that worship was to come from the heart of a person

who had deep emotional feelings for his God. Worship was not to be in some geographical sphere but in the sphere of attitude of heart and mind.

It is the immaterial part of a Christian that worships God. God communes with Christians through the human spirit. **“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children” (Rom. 8:16).** A Christian serves God through a redeemed human spirit. **For God, whom I serve in my spirit . . . (Rom. 1:9 - NASB).** In worship, the worshipper is wholly engaged in the act of worship. The renewed mind is also involved in the act of worship.

“And that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Eph. 4:23-24 - NASB).

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Rom. 12:2).

The heart is the seat of the emotions so we know the redeemed emotions of Christians seek God with the whole heart. **“I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders” (Psa. 9:1).** **“I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands” (Psa. 119:10).** Acceptable worship demands a commitment of the whole immaterial man. **“Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name” (Psa. 103:1).** Worship involves deep contemplation of the person of God, meditation upon the works of God and appreciation of our approach to God, through Christ Jesus the Lord. God also wants the heart as well as the head. It is an insult to give God a divided and fragmented heart. Love for God is as important as knowledge of Him.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Worship Is Giving Not Getting. The basic purpose of worship is not that Christians should get a blessing in worship but whether God is pleased with the Christian’s worship. Worship is the giving of the mind, the will, the emotions and the body to God. It is the giving of all that we are or have to the worship of the one, true and living God who is manifested in Christ and revealed in Holy Scripture. Beware of Christians who are “need centered” in their worship of God. If they stress what God can do for them more than what they can give God, they have a perverted form of worship. If a person says, “My needs were not met in worship,” he may really be saying that he is putting nothing of himself into his worship of God. A Christian will not experience fullness in true worship until he consciously wills to give himself to the worship of God. Each Christian must ask himself the question, as did the psalmist, **“How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me” (Psa. 116:12)?** However worshippers who give themselves to God will receive spiritual blessings in return, and they should anticipate blessing. As they give themselves to God worship, they will receive blessings, but they must give of themselves whether they receive anything or not.

Worship Is by Faith. A God who is Spirit can only be communicated with by spiritual means. Spiritual worship is offered through faith in the living God as He is revealed in the Bible. Worship in spirit is something internal, not external. Any worship, which tries to reach God through emotions, feelings, and aesthetics alone is a false worship. God cannot be reached through beads, crosses, pictures, and buildings or trumped up emotional meetings. God can only be reached by faith as He is revealed in Holy Scriptures.

Worship Does Involve Emotions. God does want us to experience Him. He does want our emotions to be moved towards Him, but He wants the emotions to be moved by the truth of the Word of God. God wants us to weep and laugh and get excited and show seriousness of purpose in our worship of Him. God through the Word, as the Christian exercises vital faith, must move the emotions. If we are to properly worship God, we must use the means He has instructed us to use in the Bible.

Worship Is a Moment by Moment Attitude. Worship is not to be regulated to the hours of eleven and twelve on Sunday morning. Worship is a moment-by-moment experience. In fact, if we have not been worshipping during the week, we will get very little out of collective worship on Sunday. Worship is being occupied with God through Christ and presenting one's body (life) for the service God has prepared for us. We worship when we read the Bible, pray, witness, clean house, change diapers, play with the kids, make a business deal, type a letter, do well in school, do a good job at work or whatever as long as we do these things for the glory of God.

Worship can Only be Pleasing to God When it is Spiritual Worship. There are some external aspects of the Christian religion but God will never be pleased with mere physical aspects of worship. This is clearly taught through the sacrificial system in the Old Testament. The offering of sacrifices without a heart for God was repugnant to God.

“I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offering, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps” (Amos 5:21-23).

What God always wants is an obedient heart from His people

“For when I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not just give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices, but I gave them this command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you” (Jer. 7:22-23).

God spoke to disobedient King Saul through Samuel. **“But Samuel replied: ‘Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the**

voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams” (1 Sam. 15:22). God desires all true believers to have a humble and contrite heart before they offer any external kind of worship.

“You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Psa. 51:16-17).

Our bodies sitting in a church pew means nothing to God unless our hearts are there to worship Him. When we pray out loud, this is of no consequences to God unless our hearts beat for Him. Praying out loud may help us and certainly it helps others to enter into this prayer, but God is interested in our hearts more than our public prayers. God is not one bit impressed with our singing voices unless we sing out of pure love for Him. Songs create no sensation to God; they do to us but not to God. God is only interested in the heart that produces the song. All physical aspects of worship mean nothing to God and create no sensation to God except they are given by faith. When given by faith, they are well pleasing to Him.