

ACCEPTABLE INDIVIDUAL WORSHIP

Lesson 7

Worship of God in Truth

John 4:19-24

“Doctrine, doctrine, doctrine, all I ever hear is doctrine! I just want to love God and serve Him. Learning wearies my flesh. Doctrine divides Christians and I want to love them. Why can’t I just love God without doctrine?” This is a very prevalent attitude among many so-called evangelical Christians today. Is this the right attitude? I think not, for it is impossible to worship God aright and serve Him correctly without a proper understanding of Christian doctrine. Acceptable worship is directly related to a proper understanding of the Word of God.

The neglect of the doctrines of the Bible was the very problem of the Samaritan woman. She as all Samaritans accepted only the five books of Moses and rejected all the other Old Testament books. Her religion was based on insufficient revelation. While the Samaritans had a physical temple, an earthly priesthood and literal animal sacrifices based on partial revelation, their religion was not acceptable because it was not based on the full revelation of the Old Testament. They were also very sincere and zealous about their religion, but they were unable to render acceptable worship to God. Christ specifically told this woman that worship must be “in spirit and 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).

What was her problem? She had “spirit” (zeal) without “truth.” She was deficient in her understanding of the God of Scripture; therefore, she could not worship God correctly. She needed to have a complete revelation of God, so she could worship in truth.

Christ taught the Samaritan woman what every Christian should know and understand explicitly; that is, Christianity is a revealed religion and rests on the unveiling of the hidden Creator Himself. **“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).** Christianity states dogmatically that the Triune God has made a revelation of Himself in a general way in creation and the human conscience and in a particular way in Christ and in the written Bible. Christianity is not a religion thought up by men. It is a revelation directly from God. Revelation is “a disclosure of what was previously unknown” or “the act of God by which He discloses Himself and truths concerning Himself to man, which truths could not be obtained by man in any other manner” or “the act of communicating divine knowledge by the Spirit to the mind.” Revelation deals with how God communicates divine truth, making a manifestation of Himself and His will to men. J.I. Packer, in the book *God Speaks To Man* says,

“Revelation is a divine activity: not, therefore, a human achievement. Revelation is not the same thing as discovery, or the dawning of insight, or the emerging of a bright idea. Revelation does not mean man finding God, but God finding man, God sharing His secrets with us, God showing us Himself. In revelation, God is the agent as well as the object. It is not just that men speak about God, or for God; God speaks for Himself, and talks to us in person. The New Testament message is that in Christ God has spoken a word for the world, a word to which all men in all ages are summoned to listen and to respond.”

TRUTH IN CHRIST

The whole of the Old Testament is a revelation from God, but the Old Testament pointed forward to Jesus Christ, God’s ultimate revelation. Christ constitutes the apex or the climax of all revelation, not chronologically but qualitatively. God has spoken to men in His Son, Jesus Christ. **“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe” (Heb. 1:1-2).** When God revealed Himself in Christ, He could go no further. Christ was the ultimate end of all revelation. All that is written in the New Testament is simply explanatory of what God has done in revealing Himself in Christ.

Jesus Christ is God’s full and final revelation of truth. **“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).** All that the Old Testament contained in types and shadows are now reality and substance in Christ the Lord. The tabernacle, temple, priesthood, sacrificial system, incense, ornately dressed priests, and many other things were all types and shadows that pointed forward to the ultimate revelation of Jesus Christ. They were mere reflections of the true substance and worked upon the human senses. Ultimate reality and spiritual truth has come in Christ Jesus the Lord. Therefore, all that Christ taught and did is truth. The reason Christ claimed to be the only way to the Father was because He was truth. **“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’” (John 14:6).**

Worship Must be Based on the New Covenant. In Christ, God has established the New Covenant forever and every Christian is a New Covenant believer. To return to any part of Old Testament (Old Covenant) worship is to dig up what God has buried and to exchange the light of the sun for a dimly lit candle.

God has made a final revelation in His Son, the mediator of the New Covenant, and to go back under Old Covenant worship when He has established the New Covenant is slapping God in the face. Old Testament physical worship is no longer acceptable to God, for He will only accept worship that is “in spirit and truth.” Any earthly physical priesthood that sees the minister as a priest, has an altar in the church sanctuary, and allows any ritual designed specifically to appeal to the five senses of man alone must never be allowed in New Covenant worship. God is speaking to us today in spiritual

realities in Christ and not primarily in physical substances. Unfortunately there are today many so-called evangelicals who are living in the types and shadows rather than in the glorious reality of Jesus Christ. Their worship is not “in spirit and truth.”

Worship in the New Covenant is distinct from worship in the Old Covenant because it is based on the truth of the gospel, the full revelation of Christ’s person and work. The New Covenant emphasis is upon the truth of Christ’s death, resurrection, ascension and return.

Worship Must be Simple. Private and public worship must be kept simple so that the physical senses do not get in the way of true worship by faith. God has left us His Son Jesus Christ and the Word and that is all we need in the New Covenant to worship effectively. Beware of any teaching that would put the Christian back under the Old Testament dispensation and forms of worship.

TRUTH IN THE BIBLE

The Bible is a Revelation. The Bible is also truth. Scriptures are a revelation given in propositional form; that is, real words are given by God to communicate to man. God has not only spoken in mighty acts of history such as the incarnation of Christ, His life, His death and His resurrection, but God has also spoken in verbal form through the Bible.

“We accept man’s testimony, but God’s testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:9-12).

The Bible becomes the final interpreter of the Christ event. The Bible as revelation is historical, objective, verbal and completed. The Bible is a written revelation from God and is, in an objective sense, the Word of God whether anyone believes it or not. It is impossible to know the Triune God apart from the Bible, for all we know about God is in the Bible.

The Bible is Inspired. The Bible makes its own claim to inspiration. **“All Scripture is God-breathed (inspired) and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16).** This means that every word of Scripture is God-breathed; that is, the words are breathed out or spring out from God. It is the Scripture that is inspired. God inspired the finished product of each book when the authors of Scripture penned the books. We have, therefore, inspired Scripture and not inspired writers of Scripture.

Scriptures are not the product of God and man (man cooperates) or God in man (an inspired man) but God through man. The Bible also makes the claim that the Holy Spirit controlled the writers at the time of writing of the Bible.

“Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

When writing, the writers of Scripture were “carried along,” “borne along” or “moved” by the Holy Spirit so the exact words God wanted were written down. Remember, all the writers of Scripture had a sin nature and were capable of making an error, but God sovereignly and supernaturally controlled them so that they gave revelation in written form, which was inspired, authoritative, and without error. The Bible is the infallible Word. There are no infallible interpreters but there is the infallible Bible. One of the main reasons to accept the inspiration of Scripture is that Christ Himself believed the Bible to be inspired and inerrant.

“I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (Matt. 5:18)

“ . . . and the Scripture cannot be broken . . .” (John 10:35).

If the Son of God accepted the inspiration of Scripture, then why should any servant of His deny it?

Evangelicals today hold to the verbal-plenary inspiration of Scripture: that is, every word is inspired and the whole (full) Bible is inspired. A good definition of inspiration would be: *God so supernaturally directed the minds of the writers of Scripture that without waiving their intelligence, literary style or personal feelings, or any other human factor, His complete and coherent message to man was recorded with perfect accuracy, the very words of the original manuscripts bearing the authority of Divine authorship.*

The Bible is Truth. The Bible is itself absolute truth. **“Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17).** Every word can be trusted, for it is the very Word of God.

“And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe” (1 Thess. 2:13).

We can trust the Bible because it is truth. Are there not some that claim there are errors in the Bible? Yes, there are, but these are only claims but they have never been

proven to be true. Any honest evangelical would admit the possibility of error in the transmission of the text, for we do not have the original manuscripts; however, through the science of lower textual criticism we can almost reproduce the original manuscript of the New Testament. It is more difficult to do this in the Old Testament, but discoveries like the Dead Sea Scrolls have merely shown how accurate our present copies of the Old Testament are. Honest evangelicals will admit in a very few cases there are some apparent contradictions in Scripture, but the problem is not with God's inspired Word but with our limited knowledge. We are thousands of years removed from the time of the writing of the Bible. However, archeology is proving everyday the tremendous accuracy of the Old and New Testaments. What contradictions there seem to be are few; the textual problems are minor and there is no major doctrine of the Bible affected by any of the problems.

Paul Little, in his book *Know Why You Believe*, gives a solid answer to the evangelical's problems with the Biblical text. He says,

“There are some other problems, which as yet do not yield a ready explanation. We must freely admit this, remembering that many times, in the past, problems resolved themselves when more data became available. The logical position, then, would seem to be that where there are areas of apparent conflict, we must hold the problem in abeyance, admitting our present inability to explain but awaiting the possibility of new data. The presence of problems does not prevent our accepting the Bible as the supernatural Word of God.”

J. C. Ryle gives an honest evaluation of an evangelical's position on inspiration. He says,

“Give me plenary, verbal inspiration with all its difficulties, rather than the doubt. I accept the difficulties, and humbly wait for their solution; but while I wait I am standing on a rock.” (Source unknown)

The Bible is a Book of Doctrine. The word “doctrine” simply means “teaching.” When we speak about doctrine we are speaking about the teaching contained in the Bible. There is the doctrine of Christ, of the Second Advent, of the Bible, of salvation, of Christian living, of witnessing, of praying and hundreds of other teachings in the Bible. An inspired Bible has been given so men might know the doctrine of Scripture. **“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (1 Tim. 3:16).** Without doctrine, we cannot live the Christian life or worship God correctly. Doctrine is nothing but a revelation of God and how He wants His people to live. In the Book of Acts we find that doctrine was essential to corporate worship in the early church. **“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching (doctrine) and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42).** They continued in the Apostle's doctrine and our task is to find out what the Apostle's doctrine was from the written Word of God. Every truth we learn gives us more understanding of God and appreciation of His greatness. One of the marks of the last day

before Christ's second coming is that supposed Christian men will fall away from the true Faith and follow after the doctrines of demons. **"The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons" (1 Tim. 4:1).** We are warned that men will not want strong doctrinal teaching and will do everything to get teachers who will compromise and tell them what they want to hear.

"Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths" (2 Tim. 4:2-4).

Faithful ministers teach the "whole counsel of God" to their flocks without compromise, for they are teaching God's inspired revelation. **"For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will (counsel) of God" (Acts 20:27).** One of the marks of a spiritual babe in Christ is that he does not want strong doctrine and deep truth. There is also the problem of spiritual pride, for a little knowledge puffs up. A person may want to be learning something new all the time, but not reveling in and obeying the truth he already knows. A person that says when hearing a message or reading his Bible, "I have heard that before. I know what this passage of Scripture says already. I have already memorized this verse," has a very serious problem with spiritual pride and immaturity. As a Christian grows up spiritually, his learning of straight biblical and theological facts continues because Christianity is a dogmatic religion based on the Bible, but he never stops learning more about God and knowing God in his experience. We never stop growing in knowledge of God and fruitfulness to Him.

"For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (Col. 1:9-10).

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

The Bible is a Revelation Not a Medical Book. The Bible is a revelation from God about God. It is not a book on psychology that helps us to deal with our daily problems only. God has made a revelation of Himself and every word and every concept and every doctrine is relevant to us because these truths tell us about God. It is our human responsibility to learn all we can about the written revelation so we can experientially know God. The whole counsel of the Bible is to be taught to men and then application is to be made to one's life. The Bible is not primarily a book written as a manual to handle problems, although it gives the spiritual basis for handling the problems of life. We do not go to the Bible to solve our problems, but we go to the Bible to know God who in turn meets our deepest needs as we commit to Him. The Bible approached purely as a manual for problems will never produce deep worshippers of Almighty God.

A Defective View of the Bible Produces a Defective Worship. Where the written Word of God is rejected, neglected or perverted, worship is rendered unacceptable in direct proportion to that rejection or neglect of the Word of God. Atheists, infidels and agnostics have no worship at all. Protestant liberals and cultists have a corrupted worship that is not acceptable to God. Even evangelical Christians are perverted in their worship to the extent that they are ignorant of the whole counsel of God. Evangelicals must accept the whole Bible without reservation so as to give God all the glory in worship.

The Bible is the Only Rule of Faith and Practice. Nothing must be introduced into our acts of worship in private or public for which there is no biblical warrant. Acts of private and public worship should be according to the Bible alone. This was a big issue in the Reformation between Luther and Zwingli. Luther believed whatever is not specifically forbidden in Scripture was all right to practice. Zwingli believed there should be nothing in worship except that which is specifically and clearly taught in the Bible. Luther's view permitted him to keep high liturgical worship in the Lutheran church. Zwingli had simplicity of architecture and forms of worship. In my opinion, Zwingli had a more Biblical concept of worship than Luther for he more clearly saw the Bible as a revelation, which spoke specifically on matters of faith and practice.

Is the Bible like a paper pope? Absolutely not! The Bible is inspired by God and popes are not biblical. The Bible is the only authority and not to hold this allows every man to do that that is right in his own eyes.

The Bible Alone is the Guide for Feelings. Feelings can always be deceptive. It is quite possible to have a religious experience without Jesus Christ. It is also possible to worship on a human level without truly worshipping God. It is possible for men to have some kind of experience of talking with or to God and still not worship biblically. For sure, God wants Christians to worship in spirit, but not at the expense of truth. He wants His people to experience Him but to do so through the Word of God. Subjective Christian experience is always to operate within the framework of objective biblical truth. It is through the biblical understanding of Scripture that one comes to really know God. If we need more faith, then we should read and memorize the Bible. **“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17).** The Bible is a living book and the more we read it, memorize it, and meditate upon it, the more we understand about God and His purposes.

“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Heb. 4:12).

Spurgeon said, “This Bible will keep you from sin or sin will keep you from the Bible.” It is always true that dusty Bibles mean dirty lives.

The Bible should be read as a love letter from God to us. Each paragraph, each line and each word tells us something of the God who loves us. The Bible takes us beyond the words to the person of God Himself. Just as we never tire of reading a love

letter, we must never tire of reading God's Word, for it is through the Bible that we learn of His love for us.

The Bible is Necessary for Worship. Without a right understanding of the Bible we cannot offer up acceptable worship to God. A person who continues in the Word is a true disciple of Christ. **“To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples” (John 8:31).** Since worship comes from a total revelation of Scripture, it is absolutely essential that each Christian reads his Bible regularly and studies it consistently. In public worship, there must be a systematic reading and exposition of Scripture. The Bible must be read and re-read with a devotional emphasis whether learning a practical truth, grasping a deep theological concept or parsing a Greek verb. Before we read books about the Bible, we should be acquainted with the Bible. If we read books about the Bible, let us be sure we read good, solid Christian literature that will give us an appreciation for the Bible and the God who wrote it. Always check the books you read about the Bible with the Bible to be sure what an author is saying is biblical.

TRUTHFULNESS FROM THE CHRISTIAN

To worship God in truth may also refer to the fact that every Christian must be truthful before God, open and honest with his own life, as he reads the Word of God. If Christians are to understand the objective revelation of God's written Word, they must subjectively yield themselves to the truth of God's Word. The Bible is true whether men believe it or not, but it only becomes a living reality to those who accept what it says at face value and apply it to the life. We must believe what God says about His Son Jesus Christ and how He relates to our daily Christian lives. We must yield ourselves to what God says about us, and, as He shows us our sin, we must confess it and do what He commands us to do as Christians.

Every Christian must evaluate his life continually in light of the Word of God. He must allow the Word of God to convict him of sin and to produce a cleansing effect in him. **“Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17).** The Bible is alive to the believer who is prepared and ready to accept it. It is not possible to give acceptable worship to God unless a person is living in the Biblical commands, promises, principles, concepts and precepts. A hunger for God's written Word will produce growing, dynamic Christians. **“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good” (1 Pet. 2:2-3).**