

Worship "*In Spirit And Truth*"

In Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, the word "*worship*" (or a form of the word) is used nine times (John 4:20-26). Any discussion of New Testament worship, and how God expects to be worshipped, must include this important text.

It is important for Bible students to distinguish between English words and actual Bible terms. Sometimes in translation there is an exact correspondence from Greek to English and sometimes there is not. This is the case with "worship."

"Worship" is derived from the Anglo-Saxon "weorthscipe", which is a combination of "weorth", meaning "worthy", and "scipe", meaning "state or quality." To worship God means to ascribe worth to Him; to give Him reverence and honor; to regard Him with veneration. The word for worship that Jesus and the Samaritan woman used is *proskuneo*, and seems to be more intensive and specific than the English word used to translate it. *Proskuneo* means to "do obeisance to; to prostrate oneself before." In normal usage, "worship" has come to mean engaging in specific acts of praise and adoration. However in recent times, some have been using the word in a broader sense to include acts of service. This is not wrong to do since "worship" still means ascribing worth to God, etc. Languages evolve and words change in how they are used. It seems important, to this writer, that when a person discusses worship that he or she defines how they are using the term. It is my view that "worship" can be understood both broadly and narrowly, depending on the word being used. On the other hand, *proskuneo*, the term Jesus used, is worship in its narrow sense.

Twice in John 4:23-24, Jesus said that true worshippers must worship God "*in spirit and truth*." The most common explanation among us is that worshipping God "*in spirit*" means to worship Him with the richness of spiritual emotion and sincerity, and worshipping "*in truth*" means to worship God through the expressions prescribed by His Word. There is no question that this understanding is true in principle, yet this falls short of what is suggested in the context.

Jesus' words suggest a contrast between worship that is coming and worship that has been practiced in the past. Jewish worship already required the heart (Deut.6:4-7) and conformity to God's law (Deut.5:32-33). What was Jesus suggesting therefore that was new?

The best explanation is that "*spirit*" and "*truth*" were not used by Jesus as two separate characteristics, but as one (Note: that we are to worship God with sincerity and in expressions prescribed by the Scriptures is taught explicitly and implicitly in many Bible texts). Jesus is saying that New Covenant worship will be offered to God from man's understanding of God's nature and His redemptive activity through Christ. Since God is "*Spirit*", then worship is only acceptable (true worship) from a redeemed spirit (the human spirit). Throughout the Gospel of John the word "*truth*" signifies more than the Scriptures; it equally signifies Christ Himself. Jesus is the personification of truth (John 14:6) so that all who abide in God's Word are of the truth, and thus of Christ (John 1:1-3, 14; 5:33; 8:31-36; 18:37). We worship God through Christ; no longer through the forms, types, altars, bloody sacrifices, or priesthood of the old system. We come to God, spirit to Spirit, through Jesus Christ.

This is exactly what the Samaritan woman needed to hear. She had been worshipping a God she did not know, in a manner that was out of harmony with God's will, from a position of moral corruption. This woman was in deep spiritual trouble until she met this Stranger who offered her living water.

Today, all worship is to be offered to God from souls who have submitted to the gospel of Christ. As we approach God in praise and adoration this Lord's day, let us do so with the full assurance that we are in Christ. He offered Himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for sins. He is due all the gratitude and worship your spirit can give Him.

Brian