

Worship in Spirit and Truth

Bible Study

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The Church of God, International (Philippines)

All Christians believers have one responsibility.
And that responsibility is to worship God in spirit
and in truth.

To worship God in spirit and in truth is easier said
than done.

You may ask: How does a believer know whether his faith leads him to the true worship?

People need to be mindful of their faith and be extra conscious in their worship of God.

There is a right way of worship and there is a wrong way of worship of God.

Proverbs 16:25

There is a right way that seems right
to a man,
But its end is the way of death...

Concerning our time, Jesus said: Many shall come in my name and shall deceive many

Matthew 24:11

(11) and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.

Matthew 24:23-25

- (23) At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it.
- (24) For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.
- (25) See, I have told you ahead of time.

We hope you do not form part of the deceived.

In today's vast and diverse world of religious groupings - particularly those espousing the teachings of Christ - it is difficult to ferret out the truth from falsehood.

Different denominations come to you with different doctrines, vying for your devotion.

So, how do you distinguish what is of the truth and what is of falsehood, and what comes from the spirit of God and what is of the world?

Today, we would like to visit an interesting account recorded in John chapter 4.

It is important that we understand what Jesus was trying to communicate through His discussion with a worshiper as narrated by the Apostle John.

Today, many people and churches continue this practice; yet the lessons in this chapter will serve as an eye opener to those who continue to perpetuate the kind of worship Jesus implied is no longer relevant.

John 4

- (1) Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John,
- (2) although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples.
- (3) So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

Jesus and the disciples were in Judea at Jerusalem where the temple is situated and they were going north to Galilee.

Verse (4) Now he had to go through Samaria.

Samaria was an area north of Jerusalem.

The shorter way to Galilee would be through the territory of Samaria. Many Jews avoided this route going up north because they do not want to mingle with the Samaritans whom they consider pagan idolaters.

Samaria is in the territory of Israel in the country of Ephraim. God tore the Kingdom of Solomon because of his sins and gave 10 tribes to Jeroboam. The 10 tribes became the territory of Israel.

But, Jeroboam sinned against God. These were the things he did as recorded in 1 Kings 12:25-33:

1. Corrupted the worship of God by changing the Holy days of God. God has set certain days as Holy days of convocation, and these Holy days of worship are listed in Leviticus 23. Jeroboam changed these God ordained dates of worship to dates of his own choosing. He exchanged the truth for a lie and enticed people to follow him.
2. Created new place of worship. Jeroboam built shrines to “replace” the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

3. Committed idolatry. He also fashioned idols in images of calf to replace the One True God.
4. Corrupted the truth with unqualified teachers of the law. He developed a worship system of his own in defiance of true worship.

As a punishment of the idolatry, Israel was captured and conquered by the Assyrians.

2 Kings 17:16-23

(16) They forsook all the commands of the Lord their God and made for themselves two idols cast in the shape of calves, and an Asherah pole. They bowed down to all the starry hosts, and they worshiped Baal.

(17) They sacrificed their sons and daughters in the fire. They practiced divination and sought omens and sold themselves to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, arousing his anger.

2 Kings 17:16-23

(18) So the Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them from his presence. Only the tribe of Judah was left,

(19) and even Judah did not keep the commands of the Lord their God. They followed the practices Israel had introduced.

2 Kings 17:16-23

- (21) When he tore Israel away from the house of David, they made Jeroboam son of Nebat their king. Jeroboam enticed Israel away from following the Lord and caused them to commit a great sin.
- (22) The Israelites persisted in all the sins of Jeroboam and did not turn away from them

2 Kings 17:16-23

(23) until the Lord removed them from his presence, as he had warned through all his servants the prophets. So the people of Israel were taken from their homeland into exile in Assyria, and they are still there.

Who were the Samaritans? When Israel was conquered by the Assyrians, Samaria became inhabited primarily by non-Israelites.

The King of Assyria exiled the Israelites into foreign lands and in turn brought people from other countries to live in Israel, placing them in the cities of Samaria.

2 Kings 17:24-34

(24) The king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Kuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim and settled them in the towns of Samaria to replace the Israelites. They took over Samaria and lived in its towns.

(25) When they first lived there, they did not worship the Lord; so he sent lions among them and they killed some of the people.

2 Kings 17:24-34

- (26) It was reported to the king of Assyria: “The people you deported and resettled in the towns of Samaria do not know what the god of that country requires. He has sent lions among them, which are killing them off, because the people do not know what he requires.”
- (27) Then the king of Assyria gave this order: “Have one of the priests you took captive from Samaria go back to live there and teach the people what the god of the land requires.”

2 Kings 17:24-34

- (28) So one of the priests who had been exiled from Samaria came to live in Bethel and taught them how to worship the Lord.
- (29) Nevertheless, each national group made its own gods in the several towns where they settled, and set them up in the shrines the people of Samaria had made at the high places.

2 Kings 17:24-34

- (30) The people from Babylon made Sukkoth Benoth, those from Kuthah made Nergal, and those from Hamath made Ashima;
- (31) the Avvites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burned their children in the fire as sacrifices to Adrammelek and Anammelek, the gods of Sepharvaim.

2 Kings 17:24-34

- (32) They worshiped the Lord, but they also appointed all sorts of their own people to officiate for them as priests in the shrines at the high places.
- (33) They worshiped the Lord, but they also served their own gods in accordance with the customs of the nations from which they had been brought.

2 Kings 17:24-34

(34)To this day they persist in their former practices. They neither worship the Lord nor adhere to the decrees and regulations, the laws and commands that the Lord gave the descendants of Jacob, whom he named Israel.

2 Kings 17:40-41

(40) They would not listen, however, but persisted in their former practices.

(41) Even while these people were worshiping the Lord, they were serving their idols. To this day their children and grandchildren continue to do as their ancestors did.

These people were problematic. These foreign nationals came into the land and were introduced to the false worship of God which Jeroboam started.

They thought and claimed to worship the true God,
but they were idolaters and full of falsehood
because of the erroneous worship they inherited
from the Israelites.

They thought they were worshipping the true God
but they did not.

Their sincerity and devotion was misdirected.

(5) So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph.

(6) Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

Jesus took this route and came into the territory.
Jesus came for a particular reason. The reason will
become apparent in a while.

This territory was initially bought by Jacob after reconciling with his brother Esau and we can read that in Genesis 33:18-19.

Genesis 33:18-19

- (18) After Jacob came from Paddan Aram, he arrived safely at the city of Shechem in Canaan and camped within sight of the city.
- (19) For a hundred pieces of silver, he bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, the plot of ground where he pitched his tent.

(7) When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?”

(8) (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

(9) The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

The Samaritan woman was not only surprised that a Jew would ask favor from a Samaritan and a woman at that. She even refused to give Jesus a drink - not a very cordial reception.

(10) Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”

Jesus technically said if it were the reverse; if you asked from me a gift I would not hesitate to give you. The gift that Jesus was referring to is the Holy Spirit.

(11) “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?”

How on earth could Jesus draw the water when the well was deep and He had no equipment, not even a bucket, she wondered.

She missed the point of Christ about the living water that represents the Holy Spirit. She was thinking and pre-occupied with the physical water.

(12) Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?”

Well, our father Jacob was a great man, he dug the well for his family and his livestock. But, how about you? How do you expect to access the well? All her perspectives were on the physical matters.

(13) Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again,

(14) but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

Jesus said if you drink water drawn from the well you will get thirsty again. But, the water that He gives will be eternal and a spring of water that will well up into eternal life.

Jesus tried to expound that He was talking about spiritual things – the gift of the Holy Spirit.

(15) The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”

Her mind was still on the physical water. Come to think about it; many people or church are like this Samaritan woman.

They cannot get off from the physical realm into the spiritual realm. Many times when you try to explain spiritual things, people just do not get it.

The conversation was not progressing as intended and was going nowhere. So Jesus shifted the conversation a little bit. He needed to demonstrate a bit of his power to reveal who He was.

(16) He told her, “Go, call your husband and come back.”

(17) “I have no husband,” she replied. Jesus said to her, “You are right when you say you have no husband.

(18) The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.”

Jesus now revealed a little about Himself. He is able to know the deep secrets of the heart.

(19) “Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet.

Now, the Samaritan woman realized she was talking not to ordinary Jewish person but to a man of God because he knows her deep personal secrets.

(20) Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

The mountain referred by the Samaritan woman is Mount Gerizim (mountain of blessing) where the temple of Bethel was situated near-by.

Now, she launched into a religious discussion regarding the right place of worship and the true God.

(21) “Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

Jesus said worship is not about the place or the temple. Interestingly, many people still look for a physical church building as a place of worship. Jesus said: it is not about a place or a structure.

(22) You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is of the Jews.

The Samaritans' worship of God was full of errors and falsehood. They were not properly worshipping the True God. They had false temples, idols, false teachers and false dates of worship!

They were worshipping the True God,
But not in the proper way...

They inherited the false worship and idolatry of Israel started by Jeroboam. True to Jesus' declaration: they worship what they do not know.

Today, millions of people continue in false worship –
worshipping things they do not know.

Jesus added that the true worship was that of the Jews. Jesus here confirmed that the Jews had the right worship.

They had the divine understanding and mandate by God. Then, Jesus added one critical thing.

(23) Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.

Worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth. This statement is most interesting and revealing

It strongly implies that the Samaritans had the wrong worship. They were not of the Spirit and not of the truth.

The Jews had the right worship and proper instructions of worship.

But they had problems in following the instructions, and after many generations, they had formed too many ideas in their interpretation of “the truth.”

(24) God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in Spirit and in truth.”

What did Jesus mean by this statement?

The Samaritans worship physical things: the place
Mount Gerizim, the temple at Bethel, the idols, etc.

And, they did not follow the commandments of God. They veered away from the truth – the truth about God, His commandments and His appointed Holy days.

(25) The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

They too were expecting a Messiah. At least they knew the prophecy.

(26) Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”

Jesus revealed that He was the Messiah who was to come.

(27) Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, “What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”

(28) Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people,

(29) “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?”

(30) They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

(31) Meanwhile his disciples urged him, “Rabbi, eat something.”

(32) But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”

(33) Then his disciples said to each other, “Could someone have brought him food?”

(34) “My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.

(35) Don’t you have a saying, ‘It’s still four months until harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.

(36) Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together.

(37) Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true.

(38) I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor."

(39) Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did."

- (40) So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days.
- (41) And because of his words many more became believers.
- (42) They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”

How to Worship

What is the lesson of Jesus' discussion with the Samaritan woman? It is revealing! We can only worship God in the Spirit and in truth and that is true worship!

Today, many people continue to worship God through physical and material representations and things.

Some look for a church structure, others in idols and images like the saints, and yet others on religious relics like the rosary and the cross.

They worship God through these so-called prayer and/or visual aids. Exactly like the Samaritan woman.

Jesus said in order to worship God who is spirit, the true worshipper has to worship the Father in Spirit. Meaning worship God beyond the physical trappings.

We are able to worship God on a spiritual level – and able to access God through the Holy Spirit that dwells within true believers.

This is how the Apostles describe it:

1 Corinthians 3:16;

Romans 8:26-27,

1 Corinthians 2:10-14,

Acts 2:38 and

John 14:17.

1 Corinthians 3:16

(16) Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?

Romans 8:26-27

- (26) In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.
- (27) And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

1 Corinthians 2:10-14

(10) these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.

(11) For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

1 Corinthians 2:10-14

- (12) What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us.
- (13) This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.

1 Corinthians 2:10-14

(14) The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.

Acts 2:38

(38) Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

John 14:17

(17) the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

In the world, there are as many lies and falsehoods masquerading as truth as there are many churches.

Paul told Timothy to rightly divide the word of truth. He wrote:

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” 2 Timothy 2:25 (NKJV)

As Christians, we have a responsibility to search out the truth, and hold fast to them.

John 8:31-32

“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Truth is to be free from error and deception.

So, how do we distinguish what is true and what is false, and what God said from what man said?

John said many falsehoods have gone into the world.
Thus, many churches are vying for our devotion.

1 John 4:1

1 John 4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

There is one simple way of discerning what 'God said' from what 'man said'. In the Bible, God speaks to the people.

When you read the Old Testament look for the phrase “The Lord said...” which occurs about 3,800 times in the Old Testament.

In the New Testament look for the “red letter” texts – these are direct quotations, these are what “Jesus said”.

What “God said” and what “Jesus said” are the basis of truth, and they are the words that you need to listen to for they are the words of truth.

Any teaching that runs counter or against God's spoken words are falsehood and lies that you should take note of and stay away from.

Summation

When we worship God in spirit through the Holy Spirit that dwells in us; we have to transcend the physical realm of structures, places, images and relics, and connect with God through the Holy Spirit.

We also need to
transcend man-made
traditions and errors, and
to embrace the truth.

Hebrews 12:14-18

- (14) Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.
- (15) See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

Hebrews 12:14-18

- (16) See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son.
- (17) Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done.

Hebrews 12:14-18

(18) You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm;

Therefore, as Jesus said to the Samaritan woman and to us as well: a true worshipper will worship the Father in Spirit and in truth!

May the Spirit of God and His truth abide with
you always!