



John 4:19-26
True and False Worship

19 The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.

20 "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship."

21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father.

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

23 "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.

24 "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

25 The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When He comes, He will tell us all things."

26 Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He."

I know we read these verses two weeks ago, but I want to go over them again, and this time examine what we can learn from them about Christ's teaching regarding the true worship of God. Christ's discussion of that subject is of course initiated by the Samaritan woman's question in verse 20.

Now when I last spoke on these verses, I told you that I thought her question was a case of trying to shift the focus off of the uncomfortable subject of her sins and her specific need of salvation, to the more comfortable ground of a general discussion of religion. I still do, but a few commentators disagree, Henry for instance believes that once she realized that Jesus was a prophet she really wanted Him to teach her how to worship: he writes: "*she proposed it with a good design; she knew she must worship God, and desired to do it aright; and therefore, meeting with a prophet, begs his direction*"

She is able to pose the question because although they both claimed to be worshipping the same God, there were major differences between what the Samaritans believed and what the Jews believed regarding worship, and specifically where it was supposed to be offered – whether in Jerusalem at the temple as the Jews maintained or on Mt. Gerizim in Samaria as the Samaritans maintained.

Now how are you going to decide a question like that? Where and how should we worship? Well in verse 20 The woman sets forth the Samaritan position, which is in essence an appeal to a *little bit* of scripture and a **LOT** of tradition. She says "our fathers worshipped on this mountain" by this mountain she means Mt. Gerizim. The Samaritans didn't accept all of the Old Testament, but they did have their own version of the first five books of the OT, the Torah. And there they read that Abraham and Jacob had both worshipped in the area, and that Moses had commanded in Deuteronomy 11 & 27 that when the people entered into the land, they would assemble at the mountains of Gerizim and Ebal and hear the curses of the Law from Mt. Ebal but the blessings from Mt. Gerizim. These and other events in the Torah, led them to believe that Gerizim was *the Holy Mountain*. So they had built their temple on it, and even though the Jews under John Hyrcanus had destroyed that temple as an abomination over a century before, they continued to worship on the mountain. On top of that, this was the tradition of *her fathers*. Grandpa and Grandma worshipped at Mt. Gerizim community church, and never discount the

power of family traditions. I myself have seen genuine believers stay in hopelessly apostate churches because their ancestors worshipped there and are buried in the church yard.

Now in our day, the world would regard that as the end of the argument, you have your religious opinions, I have mine, neither can be better than the other. Even though the two positions are contradictory, you must accept that both are right. But mercifully, God is not concerned with political correctness and not offending anyone, He is concerned with truth, and because of that Christ is going to tell this woman the truth that the Samaritans have been wrong all along and why. But He does more than that, he tells her three essential things, **where** to worship, **how** to worship, and **who** to worship.

1) Where to worship: Interestingly enough, even though Jesus has just been in Jerusalem cleansing the temple and worshipping there, He tells her the answer to her question is about to change dramatically. Now what he said about the ignorance of the Samaritans and salvation being of the Jews indicates that the Jews *were* right to worship in the temple in Jerusalem. The other portions of the Old Testament including 2 Chronicles included God's specific command to build His House in Jerusalem and also indicated His intense displeasure with worship offered to Him anywhere else, such as on the altars in the high places. True the patriarchs had built altars throughout Canaan, but the Lord had instructed Solomon to build His house in Jerusalem and for all Israel to gather there.

But as we saw in chapter 2, that physical temple had been a type or copy pointing forward to the true temple. Jesus had spoken of Himself as the true temple that would be destroyed and raised up in three days. And he tells her that the hour is coming and now is, when all the types and shadows of the ceremonial law, will be done away with. Because all of them, the Temple, the Passover, the Sacrifices, even the Priests, had pointed forward to the promised one, the Messiah. And now that He is here, worship will no longer be tied to a physical temple. Now was the advent of the time of the Messiah spoken of in *Mal. 1:11 For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; In every place incense shall be offered to My name, And a pure offering; For My name shall be great among the nations," Says the LORD of hosts.*

Men will be able to worship God, anywhere, even in the depths of dank Phillipian Jail, as Paul and Silas did in their day, or the barracks of a concentration camp as Corrie and Betsie Ten Boom, or even in the present day Prison camps of North Korea. Because with coming of Christ and the explosion of the gospel, worship is no longer tied to one earthly nation, one earthly temple, and never will be again. Now anyone who is part of the temple made without hands that God is building made up of every true believer in Jesus can worship the Father acceptably wherever they live, as long as it is done **how** He commands.

2) How to Worship: That leads us to the Second part, How to worship. Jesus tells us that true worship is not a function of how we feel, or what traditions we follow. It is a matter of Spirit and Truth. And when Jesus says truth, there is an objective and subjective side to that. First objectively, the truth that teaches us How to worship that Jesus is speaking of is God's truth and communicated to us in His word, not via our feelings. The Samaritans claimed to be worshipping God, but were in fact entirely in the dark. That was because they had done something that every quasi-Christian cult has done, they added to and took away from the word of God. The Samaritans accepted their version of the Torah, but of course that leaves all the other critical revelation God gave via the Psalms, the Prophets, the Wisdom literature and so on. And then they added to God's word "the tradition of the fathers".

Now there were no doubt "good intentions" behind all their traditions, there are always good intentions behind everything we want to do in worship, and we always think that God will be pleased by our

innovations, but as Calvin tells us verse 22 shows that good intentions by themselves are entirely worthless:

“we ought not to attempt any thing in religion rashly or at random; because, unless there be knowledge, it is not God that we worship, but a phantom or idol. All good intentions, as they are called, are struck by this sentence, as by a thunderbolt; for we learn from it, that men can do nothing but err, when they are guided by their own opinion without the word or command of God. ...”

Now the Jews were on much better ground, they had the advantage in that *“to them were committed the oracles of God.”* They hadn’t taken away from God’s word, but unfortunately they too had been adding human traditions to the word of God, and Jesus was going to rebuke them for these valueless additions later in *Mark 7:6 He answered and said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. 7 And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’*

If we would just stop and consider two facts that the bible and common sense teach us, we wouldn’t add our own traditions thinking they will please God, they are 1st that we are fallen and sinful creatures, and 2nd that you and I have no sense organ that allows us to read God’s mind and feel what he approves and disapproves of. He knows that, which is why he teaches us how to worship Him in His Word. So anything that comes from a merely human source, whether its old, whether from Gerizim, Jerusalem, Rome or even the sacred city of Atlanta, is worthless, when it comes to teaching us how to worship, it is not true religion, it is *superstition*.

But merely to objectively have His truth in our hands, as you do, right now, as you hold the bible, and even to have a subjectively **true** desire to worship him, that isn’t all that Jesus said we *must* have to worship Him is it? It’s not just we must worship Him in *truth*, its Spirit **and** Truth. To worship in Spirit has two different dimensions, first biblical religion is heart religion. If as Jesus said we are just worshipping him with our lips, but our hearts are far from Him – *what are you thinking of now, is your heart fixed on God and his word RIGHT NOW or is it far away* – that is vain worship, not true worship. That’s the first dimension to Worship God aright you have to *Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength*. but that won’t happen unless you have been born again, and you have the Spirit of God dwelling inside you. Only if you have the gift of the Holy Spirit, will you have the new Heart that can and does love Him.

If we don’t have those two elements, God’s Truth through His Word, and God’s Spirit through Being Born Again through Faith which Comes by Hearing His Word. Then just like those Samaritans, we will not know who to worship or how to worship. And believe me, brothers and sisters, if we lose the importance of those, it doesn’t matter what title we people on ourselves or where we meet, we will descend into the worst kind of silly superstitious idolatry in no time.

Want proof? Well it would be too easy for me to use the example of the Roman Church and what happened to them after they began to set God’s word aside and added their own traditions. Instead lets look at what has happened to the mainline churches. These are churches that came out of the Reformation, that recovered God’s truth, but then discarded it, and with it, His Spirit.

In 1993 over 1000 female delegates from the World Council of Churches a nominally Christian organization met for the first *Re-imagining God* conference

Delores Williams, a professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York, told the group, "I don't think we need a theory of atonement at all...atonement has to do so much with death...I don't think we need folks hanging on crosses, and blood dripping, and weird stuff...we just need to listen to the god within." Speaker Chung Hyun Kyung led the delegates in an exercise that she called "pranic healing," and said that "this life-giving energy came from god and it is everywhere; it is in the sun and in the ocean; it is from the ground and it is from the trees...If you feel very tired and you feel you don't have any energy to give...go to a big tree and ask [the] tree,'Give me some of your life energy.'" At one point, the participants were led by Aruna Gnanadason in putting red dots on their foreheads. The red dots were to represent the divine within them. Then they bowed to each other, that is, to the divinity within human beings. (Throughout the Conference, music leaders repeatedly led the group in singing, "O great spirit, earth and wind and sea, you are inside and all around me.") As each speaker took the podium, she received a chanted blessing from the entire assembly. The women chanted, "Bless Sophia, dream the vision, share the wisdom dwelling deep within." A closing communion service was replaced with a service of milk and honey, and prayers and songs addressed to "Our Maker, Sophia." The audience sang in refrain, "Sophia Creator God, Let your milk and honey flow. Sophia, Creator God, shower us with your love."

That could be well be us, if we fall into the error of trusting our good intentions, adding to His word, taking away from it, following the lead of traditions old and new.

3) If we lose that, we will lose that third element that Jesus shared with that woman: **Who to Worship. And the answer is God the Father, through His Son Jesus Christ.** Now that Samaritan woman as confused as she was expected the Messiah to come, or what they called the Taheb or restorer, who would set all things right. The Samaritans knew that Moses had said that a prophet like him would come that they should listen to. As Moses had mediated God's word, the coming prophet would as well. Jesus tells her, that salvation she wanted would come through the Jews, specifically from the tribe of Judah. Jesus is that greater than Moses. The Savior, and Mediator who would lead men to God, but who as the prophet Jeremiah told us was also Jehovah Tsidkenu, God our Righteousness and Immanuel God with us. HE the Prophet, the Savior, the Messiah, was also the Son of God. To go to the Father you must Go through the Son!

You want to worship God, you must worship Jesus there is no other way, John 14:6 "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

But what of you, are you caught up in your own traditions, taking and adding, - You must worship the Son in Spirit and **Truth**

Do you think salvation comes from where you stand and worship, that being in the church is what is needed, you too must worship Him in **Spirit** in Truth

Lastly, do you praise God with your Lips but your hearts are far from Him? Jesus says that is not true worship. You need His Spirit.