



## DOES IT MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE HOW I WORSHIP?

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Good day and welcome to Let the Bible Speak. I'm happy to be with you and thankful you've joined me to study the bible. We are amid a series of lessons entitled: Does It Make Any Difference? From beliefs about doctrine and practice, to the church we assemble with, many modern people have concluded that it doesn't make a difference in the eyes of God, as long as we are sincere. Such things are mere technicalities and formalities, and God is unconcerned about what a church believes and practices. This philosophy has been dominate for many years and has "gone to seed" until relatively few people have deep convictions about what the bible teaches about much of anything. As a result, "anything goes". Even if change initially meets some resistance, just give it a little time and convictions will be replaced by preferences and we will finally become so used to the change until we no longer even think about it. This is not only true regarding moral convictions and doctrinal convictions, but how the church worships and functions as well.

We want to talk about worship for a little while today. Dozens if not even hundreds of churches in your own community will meet today or this week and worship together. Will God approve and receive all of it, regardless of what kind of worship it is? There is no doubt that God requires that our worship come from a pure and devoted heart, but does that include worshipping God in a certain way?

Long ago, a woman had a question for Jesus concerning worship. She was a Samaritan woman who had gone to the well to draw water and providentially encountered Jesus there. Their conversation is recorded in John chapter 4, and I want us to listen to the part of it described beginning in verse 20. She asked the Lord: ***"Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship."*** Jesus said to her, ***"Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. 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. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."***

This woman and her fellow Samaritans were misguided about worship. This was, largely, because they rejected a large portion of the Old Testament scriptures and did not, therefore, know all the will of God about the matter. We want to be sure we're not mistaken about worship either because worship is a central part of man's relationship with God, not only as individuals but as members of Christ's church.

Disagreements about worship are not new. The people of God have historically viewed worship as being so high and sacred that it sometimes generated great controversy. Contrast that with our day when many are indifferent about worship. They believe that one can approach God in whatever way that pleases them instead of seeking to know what God desires from the worshipper. In bible times, it was different. People rightly considered the worship of God as holy ground. There were not only questions concerning how to worship and when to worship but even WHERE to worship. This was the case with the long-standing feud between the Jews and Samaritans. The Samaritans were rejected by the Jews and viewed with contempt and disdain because of their heritage and their beliefs. The Samaritans were considered a mongrel breed between the Jews of the Northern Kingdom and the Assyrians who had long-ago invaded Israel.

In Jesus' time on earth, the differences between them were stark. For one thing, the Samaritans did not accept all the Old Testament scriptures. They claimed to follow the Pentateuch – or the five books of Moses but rejected the other books, including the historical books and the prophets. This left the Samaritans ignorant of much of God's system and dealings with His people. The result was the religion and worship of the Samaritans was impure and unscriptural. They believed that Moses in the book of Deuteronomy made Mount Gerizim in Samaria the exclusive place of worship since Jerusalem was never mentioned at that time. Since they were missing a substantial part of God's revelation, they failed to see that God had established His presence instead in the city of Jerusalem and that the temple there was the appointed place of worship. So, the Samaritans believed in worshipping on Mount Gerizim where they had built a temple at one time, while the Jews rightly believed that Jerusalem was the holy place and the right place to worship.

Jesus usually avoided Samaria but, on the occasion recorded in John chapter 4, He made an exception and purposefully went there. He stopped at Jacob's well to rest while His disciples went on to find food. While He was there, a Samaritan woman came to draw water and that historic conversation took place. Where she realized that Jesus was a prophet, she began to ask Him religious questions. That's what people often do when they are with a preacher, and so it was with this woman. Her question had to do with worship. Perhaps, Jesus could once and for all settle the long-running debate: "Just what is the right place to worship God?" Look beginning in verse 20. She says, "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews."

Jesus took a side in this religious controversy. That ought to tell us, by the way, that the Lord is not indifferent about doctrinal issues and debates as some people try to portray Him as being. Jesus plainly tells her; you Samaritans are wrong about this matter and your worship is wrong. The Jews are correct. Salvation is of the Jews. They are, in other words, the ones that God continued His work through and not the Samaritans whose religion and worship was misguided, corrupted, and incomplete. But then Jesus

uses her question and His answer to point to the new dispensation that was dawning. He says in verses 23-24 that the geographical location of worship was about to become irrelevant as the kingdom of God arrived and eventually swept over the earth. He states that going forward, there were only two requirements for worship. He says, "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. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.""

Notice, that Jesus says there are two qualities necessary for worship that God will accept: that it be, number one, in spirit, and number two, in truth. The Lord did not say that worshippers ought to worship in spirit and truth but rather, we **MUST** worship God in spirit and truth. No matter where worship takes place, in Jerusalem, in Samaria, in Asia, in Europe, in Africa, in America, what God demands is that it be done in spirit and in truth. To serve the Lord in spirit means that we serve Him with our inner being. Worship is not some rote, mechanical ritual that one can offer to God without involving the heart and mind. True worship demands the full engagement and devotion of the inner person. It is to come from a pure and sincere heart. It is to emanate from a mind that is set upon adoring and glorifying God. It is to be the product of a heart that is in fellowship with God and in tune with Him. If we sing to God in worship, we need to understand and mean the words we sing. Paul said "I will pray with the spirit (referring to the human spirit or the inner man here and not the Holy Spirit), and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding." (1 Corinthians 14:15) Paul also told the Romans in Romans 1:9, "For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son..." True service to God, of any kind, whether it be corporate worship with the body of Christ or the things that I daily do as an individual to serve and obey Him, must come from a sincere and earnest heart. But friend, contrary to what most folks say today, true worship requires more than just a sincere heart and a pure motive. People say, God doesn't care how we worship if we mean it and are sincere. But that's not true. That's NEVER been true and it's not true today. Jesus said that we must worship God not only in spirit but also in truth. What is truth? How can we know anything about truth? Truth is what God has revealed. Truth is what is revealed in God's word. Jesus prayed in John 17:17 "Sanctify them by your truth, your word is truth." To worship God in truth is to worship God according to what He has revealed in His word.

So, first, it matters how we worship God because requires that worship to Him be offered in spirit and truth, but second, it matters how we worship because HE is the one receiving our worship. God is the object of worship and not the worshipper. Worship, therefore, is not a matter of personal taste or style. It is not a matter of personal preference or family or ethnic tradition. True worship consists of what GOD desires from US not what WE desire from HIM. The word worship means 'to kiss the hand of' or 'to do homage or make obeisance to someone'. It means 'to make homage to one of higher rank' and it thus implies approaching the one worshipped with reverence and humility. That makes it easy to see what Jesus was requiring in John 4:23 when He said we must worship God "in spirit and in truth." Does it not show great irreverence and hubris on its very face to suggest that we can enter the presence of God and try to give Him whatever kind of worship we desire and whatever we find pleasing and suitable instead of what He finds pleasing? Yes, my friend, God is seeking worship from sincere hearts but at the same time, He demands worship that is according to His directives and His revealed word. Worship is not a show or performance. It is not about a hair raising, emotion generating experience. It is intentionally and purposefully rendering obedience to God.

Sometimes people say "well, I don't like the way we worship because I don't get much out of it." Well, friend, you're not the one whose receiving it. Yes, God has designed worship so that we are benefitted and spiritually enriched by offering worship to Him but that's the by-product of worship not the object

of worship. The aim of worship is not exciting your emotions but bringing honor to God. Worship is not a rock concert. It is not a light show. It is not about stimulating cheers and applause and showcasing talent. It is a reverent and humble offering of our obedience and service to God. And if our worship is not centered upon pleasing, honoring, and glorifying God, our worship is misguided, misplaced, and it is not accepted by Him. True worship consists of doing what God asks us to do in the way He asks us to do it and with a pure and worshipful heart. If your worship is designed to draw and please the crowds, it is not true worship. If your worship is designed to please YOU, it is not true worship. If your worship is judged by an emotion meter, you have the wrong idea about worship. Now, if worship comes from a pure heart, emotion will take care of itself. True worship from a true worshipper is joyful, fulfilling, uplifting, and all of that. But it first is on God's terms.

I want to ask today; do you have scriptural authority for HOW you worship God? Does the New Testament authorize and teach the things you will do when you come together with the church today? Or are things in your worship different than what the New Testament teaches? Do you even do things that the New Testament explicitly forbids? Carefully read Matthew 26; Mark 14; and so forth, and seriously and sincerely ask yourself, is our communion table set in the way Jesus instituted the sacred feast two-thousand years ago or have we changed it? Is our assembly ordered in the fashion that Paul said when he corrected the abuses of the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 14 with the church gathered into one place, all being taught by one man at a time, with women not doing the speaking? Most people agree that spirit matters. Why not truth?

You see, the bible describes four kinds of worship and only one of them is acceptable to God. There is IGNORANT worship such as Paul encountered in Athens in Acts 17. The idolators had constructed an image dedicated to the true God but their worship was meaningless because they didn't know the One whom they were worshipping. They were worshipping a God they did not know and had no relationship with.

Second, there is VAIN worship. Vain means empty and ineffectual. Jesus said of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 15:9, "AND IN VAIN THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE COMMANDMENTS OF MEN." When we're following the doctrines and teachings decreed by men, devised in the councils of men and commanded in the creeds of men, it is vain and empty worship and God rejects it no matter how beautiful, how moving, how exciting, how formal... it is wrong. It is vain.

Third, there is what the bible calls WILL worship or as the New King James translates it "self-imposed religion" in Colossians 1:23. The idea here is that which is imposed by the thinking and will of man and not commanded by God. But then there is TRUE worship. That is worship, according to John 4:23-24, that is directed to God in spirit and according to His divinely revealed truth.

Friend, the fact is, that God has required worship be done sincerely and according to His word since the very beginning of time. If you think it makes no difference HOW you worship God, tell that to Cain. Cain and Abel, the second generation of human beings, brought offerings to the Lord according to Genesis 4 and Hebrews 11 and one was accepted and the other rejected. Why? Cain brought an offering of his fruits and vegetables to the Lord and Abel brought a blood sacrifice from his flocks. What difference did that make? Because God had made it known that such a sacrifice was to be of a flesh and blood nature. The Hebrew writer says, "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks." (Hebrews 11:4). What does it mean that he did it by faith? It doesn't mean that he felt good about it. Faith is trusting and acting on what God has said. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by

the word of God”, said Paul in Romans 10:17. Abel followed God’s instruction and Cain ignored God and did what he wanted to do instead. There were serious consequences for his flagrant actions.

Even more pronounced and immediate were the consequences suffered by two priests in Leviticus 10 named Nadab and Abihu. The name Nadab means liberal, by the way. These two sons of Aaron burned incense before the Lord but didn’t go about it in the right way. God was so particular, He decreed that the fire in their censors come from live coals beneath the altar. Instead, the bible says this pair used strange or profane fire and brought it before the Lord and the record says the fire leapt out and devoured them. They died before the Lord! It’s a serious thing to worship God and I don’t recommend playing with fire.

We may live in the New Testament, but that doesn’t mean that God has changed and that we can, as it were, saunter in the presence of the Lord and brings whatever we want to and worship in whatever way we like. Paul said of the Corinthians “Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you.” (1 Corinthians 11:2) It matters HOW we worship God. It always has mattered, and it still does for God is the object of our worship and even today... ESPECIALLY today... He seeks those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth.

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