

J. KYLE PAISLEY MEMORIAL FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Lord's Day Morning Sermon Notes

18th September 2005

Read: John 4: 19-30

Text: v.v. 24, 25

***The Marks of Acceptable Worship***

As we noted last Sabbath the passage before us contains the clearest teaching in all Scripture on the subject of the worship of God. The instruction on this subject arose as a result of Christ's dealings with the woman at the well when He confronted her about her sinful and wicked life. As a consequence of the exposure of her sin the woman did what many sinners will do in such a situation – she sought to evade the search-light of truth by an appeal to her religion and the worship of her people, the Samaritans.

The words of her appeal to her religion and worship lie at the beginning of v.20 – “*Our fathers worshipped in this mountain.*” Her appeal to worship was essentially of a three-fold kind:

(a) The antiquity of her worship – she refers to her “fathers” worshipping on Mt. Gerizim and her people still doing so. Hence she seeks to claim merit for her worship due to its antiquity. But she was obviously unaware that antiquity is no guarantee of truth; and in the case of Samaritan worship it was erroneous from its inception.

(b) The tradition of her worship – her language shows that it was Samaritan tradition to worship on Gerizim, thus she felt secure within that traditional custom. It made her feel good about herself that she was affiliated with a system of worship that had hundreds of years of traditional ritual attached to it.

(c) The externals of her worship – she refers to worshipping on “this mountain” the reference being to the temple built on Mt. Gerizim, in which a priesthood functioned and a ceremonial ritualistic religion was practised. Thus, it is clear that she put much weight on the outward show, the externals of religion, believing that all was enough to atone for her sin.

Christ's response to the woman was to clarify what true worship is, which He does in v.v. 21-24. In these verses the Lord sets out certain points about worship, which, when they are brought together, present a clear definition of that worship which is acceptable to God. Last week we considered a number of points that characterise acceptable worship.

We noted the meaning of acceptable worship by noting that the Biblical words for worship, both in the Old & New Testaments, mean “to prostrate oneself before the object of worship.” The concept of true worship therefore is that there is this humbling of oneself before Almighty God so that He is exalted to the highest place.

Christ also revealed to this woman the mediator of acceptable worship. In v.21 He refers to a certain *hour* that would bring about an end to both Gerizim & Jerusalem being fixed centres of worship and yet the true worship of the Father would take place. As is the standard in John's Gospel, by this “hour” Christ refers to the hour of His own suffering & death by which He alone was revealed to be only mediator of acceptable worship. It is in Christ that men meet with God so that no particular place has any value or merit so as to give a sinner standing with God.

Then in the final instance Christ pointed out the means of acceptable worship in v.22 in the words “salvation is of the Jews.” Christ made this remark in the context of asserting that Samaritan worship was marked by ignorance, whereas Jewish worship was not for *salvation is of the Jews*, by which Christ meant that the Jews worshipped according to divine revelation. Thus, by “the means of acceptable worship” we refer to the revelation that God has given of Himself, a revelation that the Church must have in order to worship God acceptably.

Today we return to this passage and to v.v. 23, 24 especially in which the focus is on a most vital part of Christ's teaching, namely the marks of acceptable worship. These marks are two-fold. Note in both verses Christ's reference to worshipping the Father “*in spirit and in truth.*” These words set before us the marks of acceptable worship. Obviously He is not speaking of two different kinds of worship but of two aspects of the same worship. Moreover, it is also obvious that these two marks go together. Worship that is acceptable is to have this Christ-revealed balance – it is to be characterised by both spirit & truth; there is to be a mingling of the two when we come to worship. Let us consider this subject of the marks of acceptable worship under two main thoughts.

**I. NOTICE FIRST THE NATURE OF THESE MARKS**

It is important to determine what Christ means by these marks of acceptable worship – *in spirit, in truth*. As to nature or essence what do they signify about acceptable worship? **By these terms Christ is revealing that acceptable worship must be marked by spirituality and by sincerity.**

True worshippers are to worship the Father “in spirit”. The word *spirit* simply refers to the human spirit or soul, the heart, the inward parts as Scripture states; and from that source the worship of the N.T Christian is to arise. Thus, to worship ‘in spirit’ or in a spiritual manner is the opposite of the external rites that marked both Samaritan & Jewish worship. Acceptable worship is marked by spirituality in that it gives to God the homage of an enlightened, renewed and affectionate heart. But it is also to be “in truth” denoting sincerity. Certainly, the term could also refer to worshipping God according to revealed truth as we have already noted. But in v.v. 23 & 24 where the two terms are joined together, I propose to you that Christ is speaking of the spirituality & sincerity of worship. God requires not only spiritual or the inward part in worship, but He requires truth or sincerity in the inward parts, Psalm 51: 6. Heb 10: 22 tells us to draw near with a true heart, i.e. a sincere heart.

NB – Christ is teaching on the subject of N.T. Church worship, and He is essentially showing that it is to be free from O.T. ceremonialism. This is a vital point for it deals with the erroneous trend being adopted in various

church circles in the form of a focus on physical movement in worship. The Head of the Church insists here on a removal of the physical & a concentration on the spirituality of worship.

As noted, spirituality & sincerity in worship means that the heart is the source & spring of acceptable worship. Note some N.T. examples. See Acts 16: 14 – Lydia is said to have worshipped God but her heart was not in it for it was shut. She worshipped God obviously only in the sense that she was present in the place of worship. But because her heart was closed she certainly was not worshipping God acceptably. See also Matt 2: 2 – the wise men express their intention of worshipping Christ; and then v.11 they now engage in worship. But note a few important points about their worship of the Saviour. They worshipped the Saviour before they gave their offerings. Hence their worship was an inward exercise, an act of the soul, an act of pure adoration, admiration, praise and devotion. So their worship was distinct from their offerings, emphasizing that real worship is inward and therefore spiritual in nature. Having worshipped him from their hearts they gave of their substance to Him. Thus worship that is real, being an inward act of the soul, is accompanied by the outward evidence of devotion. Real heart worship always leads to the demonstration of practical devotion. It is not some mystical matter that has no outward, practical evidences, Psalms 96: 8, 9. See also John 12: 20 -- these Greeks were Gentiles; were among those who came up to worship at the feast of the Passover. But being Gentiles they could not partake of the Passover. However, while they could not participate in the ceremonial worship, they desired to see Christ to worship Him, v.21b. Thus, once again worship is shown to be distinct from externals & is marked by spirituality.

Now what kind of a heart is that from which there comes forth this spiritual worship?

(a) It is a prayerful heart. Worship from the heart consists primarily of prayer in the form of desires & longings after God. As we noted in v.23, the Father seeks true worshippers - i.e., He seeks them in saving them by His grace. The chief indication of having been sought by the Lord is the spirit of prayer, Gal 4: 6; Acts 9: 11. There is no spiritual worship apart from prayer. See 2 Sam 7: 27 -- prayer was in David's heart. Not a piece of memorization, not learned from a book, but arising from his heart. Moreover, he "found" the prayer in his heart. As he waited before God, prayer to God welled up spontaneously in his heart.

(b) It is a submissive heart. To worship God in spirit or in heart is to have a heart that is in submission to Him. That in itself shows that worship is a spiritual matter. Many gather in public worship, go through the form, yet their worship is vain for there is disobedience in the heart; an unwillingness to yield submission in some area. See Matt 15: 25 -- woman of Canaan came and worshipped Christ. Note the word "then" - at a certain point she worshipped Christ and prayed, that is, when Christ's word seemed to indicate that there was no hope for her daughter, v.24. To this she submitted and showed such by her heart-felt worship.

(c) It is a believing heart. See John 9: 38 - the man born blind; first healed by Christ and then saved by Christ. Note that as he declared his trust and faith in Christ he worshipped. That worship came from his heart and showed that he had a believing heart. How can that be proved? Because he worshipped one about whom there was nothing outwardly attractive. A despised figure; rejected by men; no visible appearance of majesty or glory -- it required a heart of faith to worship Christ in His humiliation.

## II. NOTICE SECOND THE NECESSITY OF THESE MARKS

Christ says so powerfully in v.24 that those who worship God **must** do so in spirit and in truth. This 'must' is final. Literally it means *it is necessary*. Note in John's Gospel there are 'musts', all denoting issues with no alternatives and all tied together. John 3: 7 – the new birth; John 3: 14 – Christ's atonement; John 4: 24 – worship that is spiritual & sincere. Note that the three persons of the Godhead are in view. Note also the order that it is in view: only those regenerated by the Spirit, justified by the atonement of the Son are able to worship the Father. But they must do so spiritually and sincerely. This necessity is grounded on two things about God.

### 1. The pleasure of God

"The Father seeketh such to worship Him." The inference is that this is what pleases Him. What a test! Today the cry is that worship should be pleasing to man. Thus, worship services are more and more designed to satisfy the carnal cravings of the unregenerate & the backslidden. The result is a grieved & an affronted God. Stephen Charnock – "When we believe that we should be satisfied rather than God being glorified, we put God below ourselves as though He had been made for us rather than we for Him." The criterion must be – when we come to worship for whose satisfaction do we seek?

### 2. The person of God

V.24, "God is a Spirit." These words simply present the spirituality of God. He is *spirit* in that He is an invisible, eternal, immaterial, incorruptible and infinite being, 1 Tim 6: 15b, 16. Thus, see the correlation between Him and the worship that must be given to Him – worship marked by spirituality & sincerity. Matthew Henry – "The spirituality of the divine nature is a very good reason for the spirituality of divine worship."

Surely the application is clear. We need to prepare ourselves to come to worship the Lord in the public assembly of His people. Moreover, we must employ every effort to promote that reverence that is due to His name when we do gather together – on the way to God's house, when we take our seats in God's house and when we are led into the worship itself. Some striking words from A.W. Tozer written many years ago – "I doubt if there ever was a time when true spiritual worship was at a lower ebb. To great sections of the Church the act of worship has been lost entirely and into its place has come that strange thing called 'the programme'. This thing has been borrowed from the stage & has been applied to the type of public service that now passes for worship among us."