

No. 15, *The Church and Its Manner of Worship*

In recent studies our attention has been set on the great truth that since the Lord condescends to dwell among His people, they are to worship Him. *The Worship of the Church* is therefore an important feature of any study of the general theme of *The Church*.

The last two studies dealt with the truth that God Himself is *The Object of Worship* in the assemblies of the saints. In dealing with that line of thought two reasons were presented, both from Psalm 95, as to why the Lord alone is to be worshipped: (a) because He is our Creator; (b) because He is our Saviour.

This issue of the Triune God being the sole object of worship necessarily leads on to another vital point -- how is He to be worshipped? This is a vital and important question, a question that in recent times has engendered much controversy due to trends in worship that are manifestly a shift away from the manner of worship as revealed in the Word of God.

To answer this question concerning the manner in which God is to be worshipped, I want us to consider the words of Christ as they are found in this text -- John 4: 22. Note that Christ Himself worshipped God -- "*WE know what WE worship: for salvation is of the Jews.*" Note that He speaks of Himself as a Jew and as one who was a worshipper. We should pay careful attention to this -- Christ worshipped His heavenly Father. Now Christ Himself was worshipped, Matt 8: 2, 9: 18. In addition, He demanded worship after His resurrection, Matt 28: 9. However, in the days of His humiliation, as the man Christ Jesus, He worshipped. He attended the synagogue in Nazareth, joining in the weekly observance of the Sabbath and worship of God. He went to the temple in Jerusalem from the age of twelve, placing Himself under the ceremonial law and observing all the feasts of worship that were held there. The Gospels are replete with references to His praying - one of the chief forms of worshipping God; to His praise, Matt 26: 30, "*when they had sung an hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*" This would have been one of the Psalms from the great 'hallel' sung by the Jews at the Passover feasts. Then, Christ was a preacher of the Word, bringing the people face to face with God's revealed will, which is the chief aim of true worship. So the Saviour Himself was a worshipper of God, as His own words in our text indicate. Hence, He was abundantly qualified to deal with this woman of Samaria on the subject of worship.

What He said to her requires very close study. There are some vital truths laid down here with regard to the manner in which God, the Object of worship is to be worshipped by His people. My purpose today is to deal with one main line of thought concerning the manner, in which God is worshipped -- that there is much ignorance attached to the worship of God. Christ said to the woman, "*Ye worship ye know not what.*" The Samaritans did worship; and they claimed to worship God. Nevertheless, Christ's words tell us that their worship was steeped in ignorance. In this brief statement, the Lord faithfully told this woman that she and her people were wrong with regard to worship. Furthermore, Christ's dealings with this woman made known that since the Samaritans were wrong in worship they were also wrong in the matter of salvation. This is the most solemn part of His exposure of ignorance in worship. Notice His next words -- "*we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews.*" Observe that the true way of worship is inseparably linked to salvation; that the Divine revelation given by God as to how men are to be saved includes the revelation of how God is to be worshipped. Christ's words show that the one cannot be severed from the other.

1. Therefore observe that where there is error in the doctrine of salvation, there will be error also in the worship of God. Where there is ignorance concerning God's way of salvation, there will be ignorance on God's way of being worshipped. A system of salvation that is erroneous is so because it is man-made. It is of the will of man and the will of the flesh; therefore, it can only be full of error. Such will be replete with human works and efforts, in a vain attempt to work up merit with God. Consequently, the worship that goes along with such a system of salvation will be the extension of those works. Hence, to put it another way, if you confront worship that is comprised of the innovations of man, you can be almost certain that behind it is a fallacious doctrine of salvation -- in one way or another, you will discover a gospel of justification by works. See Gen 4: 3 -- first worship scene in Scripture. But note on Cain's part the presence of man's embellishments in the act of worship -- his own works; the fruit of his own effort foremost in his 'worship'. Hence, it is worship that reflects Cain's theology -- it is a bloodless theology. It is one that rejects righteousness by faith in the slain lamb, v. 4.

Why the elaborate rituals, such as are found in paganism, Romanism and apostate Protestantism? Because their teaching on justification is that of works and human merit. Naturally, then, their worship service is a reflection of their theology. Why the frivolity and emotionalism of the charismatic churches? Because their view of salvation is that it is something to make men feel good, which is humanism. Hence, their services are a reflection of that philosophy. See 2 Kings 16: 10-13 -- why did Ahaz introduce this innovation? Because he had no regard for God's altar which symbolized Christ and God's appointed way of salvation, v.14. When God's way of justification is departed from, there will soon be a departure in worship.

2. Notice also that in her appeal to a form of worship there was an effort being made to avoid sin.

This woman appeals to the worship of her fathers as she tries to avoid the question of her sin. In fact, her reference to worship is an effort to conceal sin. Our text must be seen in its context -- the faithful dealings of

Christ with this woman over the salvation of her soul. One of His lost sheep and He came seeking her, v.4. Began to converse with her to make her feel her need of salvation, v.v 10, 13-15. Spoke of the living water of salvation and caused her to have an interest. However, note v.16 -- now He is putting His finger on her sin, for she was an adulterous woman. Note - in any witness to sinners they must be brought face to face with their sin and its guilt. Woman gave an answer designed to evade her guilt, v.17a. Felt that this would be sufficient to put Christ off in His probing, searching dealings with her soul, but she discovers that He knows all about her, v.v. 17b,18. She immediately realizes that He is a prophet, v.19; for the arrows of conviction are piercing her heart and she becomes uneasy. Then you will note that she immediately sought refuge behind a cloak of religion, by raising the question of where men ought to worship, v.20. She is seeking to make herself appear to be righteous, not so sinful as the Lord has revealed her to be, for she has a religion and she does worship. Cf. Prov 7: 10-15.

So this Samaritan woman appeals to the worship of her people in an effort to avoid her sin. In this there is a hint as to why many appeal to their form of worship; why people are attracted to a religion whose worship is erroneous -- it helps them to avoid facing their sin and guilt. Note her words, "*our fathers worshipped in this mountain.*" Here was an appeal to:

(a) *The antiquity of her worship* -- the Samaritans had worshipped there for a long time. This woman spoke of her 'fathers' -- they had worshipped on this mountain, and her people still did. Therefore, she endeavours to claim merit for her form of worship because of antiquity, and she hopes that such an appeal will help her own personal situation regarding her sin. Erroneous worship, resting on an erroneous way of salvation, loves to appeal to some ancient figure in the dim past, because it helps its adherents to evade the question of sin. *But antiquity is no guarantee of truth*, 2 Kings 17: 24, 26, 28, 29, 32, 33. Samaritans religion and worship were defective from the beginning - true of many. In addition, *many may appeal to antiquity, but they are far removed from their forefathers*. Pharisees were guilty of this -- constantly appealed to Moses or Abraham to try to obviate the charge of transgression. However, they had not the least semblance of the religion of their fathers, John 5: 45, 46; 8: 33, 37, 39, 40.

(b) *The tradition of her worship* -- she states that her fathers had worshipped in that mountain; so her worship was one of tradition and custom. Again, it is clear that she felt there was security in that tradition, even as the Lord was exposing her sin. How many sinners there are today, who are hiding behind tradition in worship because it helps them to feel righteous and escape the reality of sin? Traditions in worship do not receive any commendation in God's Word, Mark 7: 5. Pharisees appeal to tradition, but note how the Lord answers them: their tradition was vain worship, designed to be an escape route from facing sin. V.7 -- teachings of a human origin presented as infallible truth. V.8 -- tradition takes the place of God's Word. V.9 -- tradition elevated above God's Word. V.13 -- tradition renders the teaching of Scripture ineffective.

(c) *The externals of her worship* -- she spoke of worshipping "in this mountain." On that mount a temple had been built, a priesthood instituted and a worship system carried on. Thus, she was very proud of the externals of her religion -- they also made her feel secure. Such externals of religion always do, because they take the focus off the invisible, sinful heart of man. That is why Christ proceeded to speak to her of the "internals" of worship -- worshipping God in spirit. He is pointing this sinner to the fact that though the externals be gloried in, that is of no avail while the spirit, the heart is not right with God. What God desires primarily is a broken and contrite heart. He desires truth in the inward parts. No matter what else there may be, the worshipper who does not have that internal work of grace, that circumcising of the heart, is still in ignorance of God. May His Spirit awaken you and bring you to Christ today.

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