



True Worshipers  
John 4:21-24  
December 8, 2019

God is seeking true worshipers (v. 23). Not only does it matter *that* we worship, but it also matters *who* worships. God is not merely seeking worship but worshipers, and a certain kind of worshipers as well.

There are also false worshipers. Have you ever contemplated whether you might be a false one (Proverbs 16:2)? Jesus' next words indicate he is not thinking so much about false practices in a church service but false attitudes and lifestyle. To be true worshipers, we must continually tend to our hearts and lives.

We are to worship the Father (vv. 21, 23). This word "worship" means to bow. Doing so acknowledges that the one we bow to is superior to us. One day every knee will bow to him (Philippians 2:9-11). We should also bow down in our hearts, obedience and service (Isaiah 58; Micah 6:6-8).

Interestingly, the woman mentions worshipping but does not say who was being worshiped (v. 20). Apparently she was thinking more in terms of "doing worship" than bowing before God. This is supported by Jesus' words that the Samaritans worship "what you do not know" (v. 22). Since Samaritans only accepted the first five books of the Old Testament, they were greatly impoverished in their understanding of both God and worship.

In contrast, Jesus says we worship God, and specifically God as Father (vv. 21, 23). As Father, he loves us, cares for us, and gives

us good gifts. Of special note is the gift of "the salvation" (v. 22), a reference to Jesus. We must remember, though, that Fathers in the Jewish world were worthy of great honor and respect. God is superior to us, and it is fitting to bow before him.

We are to worship in spirit and truth (vv. 23-24). There are many different understandings of this, but the one that makes best sense to me is that we are to worship him authentically.

"Spirit" may be the Holy Spirit. He definitely helps us worship the Father (Philippians 3:3; Romans 8:15, 26; Galatians 4:6). But since Jesus is describing a kind of worship that "has now come" (John 4:23) and since the Holy Spirit had not yet been given at that time (John 7:39), I lean toward thinking Jesus is referring to our human spirit. Our spirit is able to connect with and worship God (Isaiah 26:9; Luke 1:46-47; Romans 1:9; 1 Corinthians 6:17; 7:34; 1 Thessalonians 5:23). Spirit might also be a dual reference.

"Truth" points to Jesus. Jesus is full of truth and came to testify to the truth he heard from God (John 1:14; 8:40, 45, 46; 18:37). In fact, he is the truth (John 14:6; cf. Ephesians 4:21). Pilate seems to have wondered if truth is knowable (John 18:38), but John records the ultimate truth a few verses later when he describes Jesus' death (chapter 19). Those who believe in Jesus and abide in his word are truly his disciples, know the truth and are set free by it from their slavery to sin (John 8:31-36). God's word, which is truth, sanctifies them so that they live by the truth, believe true teachings and test and reject false ones (John 17:17-19; 3 John 3-4; 1 John 2:18-24; 4:1-6). People who know and experience the truth of Jesus in these ways, in contrast to hypocritical or ignorant pretenders (Matthew 15:7-9; John 4:22) are the true worshipers (John 4:23).

To worship "in spirit and truth," then, refers to authentically bowing before God in our spirit and out of our grasp and practice of the truth of Jesus. In contrast to all my ideas and opinions, this is the one thing Jesus says true worshipers "must" do (v. 24).

