

Worshipping God "In Spirit"

In John 4:24, Jesus Christ states that "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." What does it mean to "worship God in spirit?"

Some people believe that to worship "in spirit" is to worship with spiritedness; that is, with excitement, great animation, and emotional sway. Others believe that worshipping "in spirit" requires miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit such as in utterances.

However, from Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, we learn that the Greek word translated "worship" in this passage is (proskunountas) from the verb (proskuneo), literally meaning, "to prostrate oneself in great reverence." In other words, the worship that Jesus mentions in John 4:24 describes an attitude, a mental bowing of oneself before the Almighty God in utmost reverence and humility.

We could accurately say that to worship God "in spirit" means to bow one's heart before God. 1 Corinthians 5:3 and Colossians 2:5 help us understand this phrase. In these passages, Paul comments that although he is not with his beloved brethren physically, he is with them "in spirit." This is the exact same language, the very same Greek words used by Jesus in John 4:24. Paul means that though he is not physically in the presence of the Christians to whom his letter is addressed, he is with them in mind and in heart. This is what it means to worship God "in spirit:" although we are not actually in His personal presence, when we bow our hearts and minds to Him in worship, we are to do so as if we are in His very presence.

In Matthew 15:7-9, Jesus condemns the hypocritical Pharisees for honoring God with their lips while the dedication of their hearts was far

from Him. The evidence of the condition of their heart was in the practice of their worship; they taught and practiced the "commandments of men" rather than the truth, as revealed in His word. Rather than reverencing God and keeping His commandments (Eccl. 12:13), they had made their worship vain by practicing their self-made traditions. They may have been practicing a worship that they felt joined them to God, but by failing to keep His commandments, they had actually separated themselves from Him. Indeed, for worship to be, "in spirit and in truth" our spirit must reverently practice the acts of worship as specified in God's word of truth (cf. John 8:31-32; 17:17).

In addition, we can go through all the motions of worship, even making sure to perform every act in accordance with God's word, but if our hearts are not reverently engaged, our worship is in vain. If we sing praises to God in truth, but our minds are constantly wandering to thoughts other than those to which we are directed by the lyrics of the song, our worship is not acceptable to God. If we sit through a sermon preached directly from God's Word, or bow our heads in prayers, yet our minds are focused on other things we are planning to do later that day, or week, we are not worshiping in spirit.

John 4:23 teaches that God desires our worship; He is seeking true worshipers. For our worship to be acceptable to Him, our worship must not be with disengaged hearts and minds, but we must reverently bow before God in spirit - in the acts of worship He teaches in His word - as if we were right there at His throne.- - Doug Roush