

Spirit and Truth

We have covered some of the basic aspects of God's character and His will in previous messages. In this last message of this series, Jesus presents an important principle for understanding God. This principle involves the simple elegance of religion and spirituality. Some people are impressed with all the trappings of religion such as robes or fancy clothes. Some are impressed with the beautiful architecture of churches. Some are impressed with the false power of rituals. Paul did not want to impress people with his clever words. These things are not a substitute for true spirituality. That doesn't mean we should go to the other extreme and be careless about how we serve God, either. When Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well, He revealed this underlying principle of worshiping God: we must worship Him in spirit and in truth. That is the basis for discovering the essence of the relationship for having true worship of God. When we come together in worship, whether it is in a beautiful worship center, in a cave evading persecutors, in a hospital or a prison, it is always the same. Wherever we are, we with God in our midst and we need to be sensitive to His presence. He *is* here because He is spirit.

1. God wants all people to know Him personally in their spirit -

One of the greatest, sublime, and foundational truths was consistent whether it was to a great religious council like the Sanhedrin at His trial, a theologian like Nicodemus, or the political power of Rome in Governor Pilate. It was delivered by Christ to a Samaritan woman. She was not a woman of standing in the community despised by the Jews, but someone who was arguably the lowest of the low.

John 4:1-9,19-24 When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than

John,
2 (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,)
3 He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee.
4 And he must needs go through Samaria.
5 Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph.
6 Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with *his* journey, sat thus on the well: *and* it was about the sixth hour.
7 There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink.
8 (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.)
9 Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.
...
19 The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet.
20 Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.
21 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.
22 Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews.
23 But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers **shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth:** for the Father seeketh such to worship him.
24 God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth.

When Jesus shared this statement

with the woman at the well, He demonstrated the importance of *every* soul and the presumption that *everyone* can aspire to a deep and thoughtful relationship with God. Knowing God is not just for the enlightened elite, the diligent student, or the one who can afford to buy it. It's for everyone.

It is amazing how people will work hard to have a *false* sense of significance by being the supreme expert on a sports team, the environment, or even a single genre of music, like Rock Music. You can't just say "Rock Music" because someone will then educate you about punk, rap, pop, crust punk, celtic punk, cowpunk, nazi punk, punk pop, twee pop, sunshine pop, grebo, shoegazing, and hatecore.

The knowledge of God, on the other hand, is not just for someone who is trying to create a *sense* of significance. It is *true* significance because knowing God is the most significant thing for all eternity. The knowledge of *God* is available to *everyone* because *everyone* is significant to God.

Some critics think that religion as celebrated by the common unwashed masses is based on mere superstition marked by irrational fear of natural physical forces. Whatever could be said of such religion, you can *not* say this about Christianity. Christianity has prompted more philosophy, more science, better government, and more uplifting of the suffering than any other system thought of by the world. What Jesus taught was true *spirituality*. Just all by itself, His statement about worshiping in spirit and in truth sounds important, but the significance of it almost slips past you.

In Christ's statement that we must worship God in spirit and in truth we recognize that the way we know Him is through the spiritual, not through the physical. We do not worship Him through ritual form, collections of religious artifacts, images, and other fetishes. We worship Him according to the truths of His Word.

2. We appreciate the physical, but when

it gets in the way of the spiritual, we tear it down -

In the eighth and ninth centuries in the Byzantine empire, there was a particularly difficult struggle between the iconoclasts and the iconodules. The iconodules (servants of images) successfully resisted the iconoclasts who wanted to tear down the images that were venerated and used for worship. During the Protestant Reformation in the 16th to the 18th centuries images in churches were again felt to be idolatrous and were once more banned and destroyed. Martin Luther was able to strike a balance that I think is appropriate.

Martin Luther argued that Christians should be free to use religious images as long as they did not worship them in the place of God. Zwingli and others for the sake of saving the Word rejected all [visual] art; Luther, with an equal concern for the Word, but far more conservative, would have all the arts to be the servants of the Gospel. [Luther said] "I am not of the opinion that through the Gospel all the arts should be banished and driven away, as some zealots want to make us believe; but I wish to see them all, especially music, in the service of Him Who gave and created them."

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iconoclastic_controversy

Paul amplified the proper concern when he preached in Athens.

Acts 17:24-25,29 God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;
25 Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;
29 Forasmuch then as we are the

offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.

Today the definition of an iconoclast is extended to one who tears down cherished traditional ideas that are based on superstition and error. When it comes to worshiping God in spirit and in truth, God is an iconoclast. Even though He used imagery in worship, He did not do so at the expense of the spiritual. In the Ten Commandments we are prohibited from bowing down to graven images. God had two statues of angels placed prominently on the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies, but they were not to be worshiped. God is more concerned about our spirituality than our outward conformity. When the physical obscures the spiritual then the physical is cast out. This is just the problem that Hezekiah was faced with.

2Kings 18:1,3-4 Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, *that* Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign.

3 And he did *that which was* right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father did.

4 He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan.

Nehushtan means, *a copper thing*. In other words, that brass serpent that was used to convey an important message in the time of Moses had its purpose. That purpose was limited. Besides the purpose it served, it was only a piece of copper. It was not to be used for worship.

3. God is more concerned with our hearts than our outward forms of religion -

1Sam 16:7 ...the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.

Luke 16:15 And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.

Ps 139:2 Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.

Prov 16:2 All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirits.

Isa 1:11-14 To what purpose *is* the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.

12 When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts?

13 Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; *it is* iniquity, even the solemn meeting.

14 Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear *them*.

I love this next passage. It is one of the most humorous passages in the Bible. It points out our utter folly of trying to impress God.

Ps 50:8-14 I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, *to have been* continually before me.

9 I will take no bullock out of thy house, *nor* he goats out of thy folds.

10 For every beast of the forest *is* mine, *and* the cattle upon a thousand hills.

11 I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field *are* mine.

12 If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world *is* mine, and the fulness thereof.

13 Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?

14 Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High:

God was more interested in the attitude of the believer, not in the expense of the sacrifice.

Mic 6:6-8 Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?

⁷Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

⁸He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

1Sam 15:22 And Samuel said, Hath the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, **to obey *is* better than sacrifice, *and*** to hearken than the fat of rams.

Ps 51:15-17 O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.

16 For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give *it*: thou

delightest not in burnt offering.

17 The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

Hos 6:6 For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

God was not trying be appeased by blood sacrifices so that He would send rain down for the harvest. The sacrifices were there to remind them of the need they had for the one *true* sacrifice Who would take away sins forever *and clean the heart* of man. In Hebrews 10, we are told that all of the sacrifices were to point to the one perfect sacrifice of Christ that would do that.

Heb 10:8-18 Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and *offering* for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure *therein*; which are offered by the law;

9 Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.

10 By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*.

11 And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins:

...

14 For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

15 *Whereof* the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before,

16 This *is* the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them;

17 And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.

18 Now where remission of these
is, there is no more offering for
sin.

4. Casting down idols -

I wouldn't think that I had to even mention this, but I've got to cover all my bases. In our church we will be careful to not use images, but we should also go through our houses. It doesn't matter if your dear great aunt who raised you gave you that statue of Saint Hubris – it has to go. We have got to examine our hearts to see if we have moved from appreciation of art to love of the object, to superstition, to treating such things as a fetish having some kind of power, or ultimately to becoming an object that we revere and appeal to in the time of need. People don't understand the nature of idolatry. Serving a car by washing and cleaning it on Sunday morning is truly idolatry because we are valuing *it* more than serving God. However, in ancient times, idolatry did not just involve people admiring a piece of art they had created. Idolatry involved trying to manipulate the gods to work for the idolater. They would make sacrifices and burn incense to the gods to appease them so the they would serve the worshipers by giving them success and bigger crops.

We can take our *form* of worship and do *just the same thing*.

2Tim 3:5 Having a form of
godliness, but denying the power
thereof: from such turn away.

We are not emphasizing *forms* of religion that replace the satisfaction that comes from knowing God. When you first start going to a new church, it might take a while to get used to the way the services are conducted. Church is more than knowing when to stand, sit, bow the head, shake hands, and do communion. If that is all church is about then there is a problem. When we let these things take the place of knowing God in our spirit according to the truth about Him in the Bible, then church becomes Nehushtan – a mere art performance.

A clever communicator will communicate much by what he chooses to emphasize and leaves out; he will be careful of his setting and his body language. It is not all just about what he proclaims. We are careful about the outward, but we must be desperate when it comes to making sure the inward is right.

Rom 2:28-29 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither *is that* circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:

29 But he *is* a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the spirit, *and* not in the letter; whose praise *is* not of men, but of God.

Rom 10:6-13 But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down *from above*.)

7 Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)

8 But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, *even* in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach;

9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

11 For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

12 For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Are you in rebellion against God

setting up your own superstitions about Him? Are you trusting in your statues, beads, crosses, oils, stars, cards, etc.? It is time to repent of that and turn your sinfulness over to God to cleanse by His Spirit when you ask Christ to pay for your sin with His blood, suffering on the cross, and being raised in victory over death three days later.

If you are saved, is your spirit right with Christ because you have confessed your sin or are you trusting in the *forms* of religious rituals to carry you through? Do you need to confess your sin and renew your spirit?

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2. We appreciate the physical, but when it gets in the way of the spiritual, we tear it down - Acts 17:24-25,29, 2Kings 18:1,3-4
3. God is more concerned with our hearts than our outward forms of religion - 1Sam 16:7, Luke 16:15, Ps 139:2, Prov 16:2, Isa 1:11-14, Ps 50:8-14, 1Sam 15:22, Ps 51:15-17, Hos 6:6, Heb 10:8-18
4. Casting down idols - 2Tim 3:5, Rom 2:28-29