

Prayer List

Gene
Veda
Wallace
Sheila
Judy
Rose

Services:

Sunday

Bible Class 9:00 a.m.
Assembly 10:00 a.m.
Assembly 11:00 a.m.

Wednesday

Bible Class 7:00 p.m.

Elders:

Brad Behrens - bradbehrens@pinolechurchofchrist.com
Michael Odom - MichaelOdom@pinolechurchofchrist.com
Ernie Sprinkel - preacher@pinolechurchofchrist.com

This Week's Question:

When the Israelites lost 30,000 soldiers in the time of Samuel, who were they fighting?

Answer To Last Week's Question:

Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12

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Faith and Worship

Steve Dewhirst

Nothing is more natural for a man of faith than to worship (show reverence to) his God. And nothing is more essential to true worship than a living faith. No one can rightly worship a god he doesn't know, and ritualistic observance without a true knowledge of God is hypocrisy.

One of scripture's briefest, yet most critical, discussions of the nature of worship is found in John 4, when Jesus encounters a woman of Samaria. After enough of an exchange for this woman to perceive Jesus a prophet, she turns to the central question dividing Jews and Samaritans. "Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship" (4:20). It was more of a challenge than a question. It is extremely important to note, just here, that the Samaritan woman's concern had to do with the correct form or place of public worship, to which Jesus will not respond at all. Instead, the Lord addresses what really lay at the heart of the Samaritans' misunderstanding: a fundamental lack of faith.

"You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews" (4:22). This was the real issue. Sure, they knew the name of God, but they didn't know

God. Samaritan history holds the explanation. When the Assyrians had carried the northern kingdom of Israel into captivity, the land was repopulated with gentiles from other captured states. But because these new inhabitants “did not fear the Lord,” God sent lions among the people and a number were killed (2 Kings 17:24–25). In an appeal to their Assyrian sovereign, they explained this divine punishment as stemming from the fact that they did “not know the rituals of the God of the land” (2 Kings 17:26). Note their two conceptual errors. First, they had too small an estimation of Jehovah. In their minds He was only “the god of the land,” rather than the eternal Creator of all. Typical of gentile thinking, they viewed “deities” as limited to an assigned territory. Secondly, they didn’t see Jehovah as One with whom they should establish personal relationships; instead, they needed only to know “the rituals.” If they could just learn to “call Bible things by Bible names and do Bible things in Bible ways,” they could satisfy this “new” God without having to change their lives.

Accordingly, the Assyrian ruler ordered a Samaritan priest returned to Israel to “teach them the rituals of the God of the land” (2 Kings 17:27). The people were taught “how they should fear the Lord,” but continued to make and worship their own gods as well (2 Kings 17:28–29). In one of the Bible’s most interesting statements the record says, “They feared the Lord, yet served their own gods ...” (2 Kings 17:33). How could both halves of that sentence be true? They feared God in part, but they didn’t truly know God. The next verse says, “To this day they continue practicing the former rituals; they do not fear the Lord ...” (2 Kings 17:34). The Samaritans were willing to accept their “new” God, but not to the exclusion of their old ones. In time, they worshipped both Jehovah and pagan idols side by side—and saw no inconsistency therein.

They did not know God because they weren’t interested in learning. Traditionally they accepted only the five books written by Moses, along with a much-altered version of the

book of Joshua. They rejected the prophets. They rejected the wisdom literature. They rejected most of what would have taught them of the character of Jehovah. They did not know God—they had no real faith—because they rejected the only valid source from which faith can spring (Romans 10:13). And even in their mountain worship they had goofed. God had directed an altar to be erected on Mt. Ebal when the Israelites first entered the promised land (Deuteronomy 27), but Samaritan scriptures recorded Mt. Gerizim as the proper location. They accused the Jews of changing God’s word, naturally.

As Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman at the well, she pointed to Mt. Gerizim where generations of her forebears had worshipped a God they did not even know. Perhaps the ruins of their temple, most recently sacked by Romans, could be seen in the distance. Jesus wasn’t interested in a debate over the technicalities of “correct” public worship—these lost sheep first needed to be introduced to the God of heaven! Jesus then taught a principle which was as old as mankind. “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth” (John 4:23). This was nothing new; men should always have revered God in this way.

True worshippers worship in spirit (with the whole heart) and in truth (in reality). True worship is not blind ritualism; it is devotion and reverence springing from one’s knowledge of God. One cannot worship what he does not know. Real faith will honor its object. And real faith will “establish law” (Romans 3:31), seeking to follow God’s instructions for worship and everything else.