

Rules for Worship

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Have you ever wondered about the rules for worship? Are there times when you question which way of worshipping God is the "right" way? With the plethora of churches, methods, and styles that all claim the role as a "House of Worship", I think many people find themselves wondering which is God's way. With this concern in mind, one woman poignantly inquired of Jesus the answer to her dilemma.

Not knowing that she would have the encounter of a lifetime, she may have consider edit an otherwise ordinary day as she grabbed her water jar and headed for the well. Walking along this well traveled path would afford her plenty of time alone with her thoughts. Her life had plenty of complications and her history of relationship problems brought her to such isolation that she would find herself alone on her daily ritual once again. She didn't have the other women to keep her company. She apparently didn't have the friendships to share this time with, as would be the custom in her culture. But maybe it was because of her aloneness that afforded her a private audience with the Master. Perhaps it was during her quiet solitary walks to the well that helped her formulate her questions for God. It may have been during these silent hours, were the sounds of ambient clamoring from other people's activity and the gentle rustle of a dusty road underfoot are all that is heard, that her prayer was articulated as she worked through her struggles for answers. Reviewing the conversation that took place that day, one can't help but wonder about tears shed and prayers heard in heaven that drove Jesus to set this divine appointment. For this woman's interactions with the man that she met that day was anything but ordinary. The events of those few hours would change her life.

The story I am describing to you is well known and is referenced in many sermons and books, usually as a picture of the compassionate heart of Jesus for the ones that others reject. This central theme of the story is unmistakable and is an example to us today of the way we should treat people that society rejects. Compassion, gentleness, and love for people, especially those already living with the consequences of mistakes and poor decisions, is a lesson from Jesus that we all can benefit from here. Looking further into the story, however, I want to look at one of this woman's challenges to Jesus.

Before she realized who He really is, this woman was brought to a place where she recognized that this was no ordinary man. Therefore, not yet considering Him the Son of God, she said, "I perceive that you are a prophet". This would be her opportunity to get a question answered. No doubt, there was something nagging at her that could be addressed by this man who obviously had deep understanding. One problem she was having in this conversation, however, was that she was asking the wrong questions. Jesus helped her. Although her requests for information were misplaced, He understood the real underlying needs and worked

there. He helped her realign her questions to fit the answers that she really needed. Isn't that the way we are today also? It seems to me that many times our questions are misguided. We are asking the wrong things. Look up the story for yourself. You find it in the Gospel of John chapter 4.

Inquiring to the Man who had just revealed His amazing insight into her hidden activities and offered full acceptance and restoration through "living water" that would spring up into eternal life, she redirected the conversation with her question. She asked Jesus to settle for her understanding the debate between two ideologies of the "correct" place to worship. As Jesus did regularly, He would take the matter from the outward to the inward. In doing so, He needed to correct the question to align it with the real life changing answer. He explained to her that her question is off base because she has a basic misunderstanding of the One she is worshipping. She is asking about the "correctness" of location and methodology and Jesus talks to her about matters of the heart. He said, "The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

How about you and I? Are we more like the woman who was lost in the debate or like the "true worshiper" that Jesus described? I would like to propose a challenge to search out and discover what it means to worship in "spirit and truth". We know that Jesus said that these are the one's the Father is seeking to worship Him. If we choose to go deeper into this pursuit, we may find the very answer that is most needed among God's people today. Let's put our hearts, not our rules, before the Lord in worship. Let's worship Him in genuine spiritual and truth-filled ways. Let's drink from the well that He offers from, and let living water spring up like a fountain in us and satisfy every spiritual thirst.

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Dan Nelson is a frequent contributor to the Ojai Valley News and currently serves the Ojai Valley Ministerial Association and community as editor of the Religion Column. Permission is freely granted to reprint the article in its entirety. Dan Nelson is pastor of Calvary Chapel Christian Church of the Ojai Valley.



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Sunday Worship:

9:00 & 10:45am
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View

Mid-Week Study:

7:00pm Thursday
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View