

John 4:24

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

Analysis

God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. This profound declaration by Jesus to the Samaritan woman establishes the fundamental nature of God and the essential character of true worship. The Greek phrase *pneuma ho theos* (πνεῦμα ὁ θεός) affirms that God's essence is spirit—immaterial, invisible, and transcendent. This challenges both the Samaritan fixation on Mount Gerizim and the Jewish focus on the Jerusalem temple as the only legitimate worship location.

The verb *proskyneo* (προσκυνέω, "worship") means to bow down or prostrate oneself in reverence. Jesus declares that worshipers must worship *en pneumati kai aletheia* (ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ, "in spirit and in truth"). Worship "in spirit" means worship that engages the inner person through the Holy Spirit, not merely external rituals or locations. Worship "in truth" requires alignment with God's revealed reality in Christ, who is the Truth incarnate (John 14:6).

This verse revolutionizes worship, moving beyond geographical locations and ceremonial systems to spiritual reality and covenant faithfulness. It anticipates the New Covenant where the Spirit indwells believers (John 7:37-39), enabling authentic worship through Christ the mediator. True worship requires both spiritual vitality (the Spirit's enablement) and theological accuracy (conformity to revealed truth).

Historical Context

This conversation occurs at Jacob's well near Sychar in Samaria, a region Jews typically avoided due to centuries of hostility. The Samaritan-Jewish conflict centered on worship location: Samaritans worshiped at Mount Gerizim (where they believed Abraham offered Isaac), while Jews insisted only Jerusalem's temple was legitimate. This schism dated to the Assyrian conquest (722 BC) when foreigners intermarried with remaining Israelites, creating the Samaritan people whom Jews considered apostate.

Jesus spoke to this woman at midday (the sixth hour), unusual timing suggesting social ostracism due to her immoral past. The theological discussion moves from physical water to living water, then to proper worship—showing Jesus elevating physical needs to spiritual realities. His revelation that the Father seeks true worshipers (John 4:23) indicates the coming New Covenant age when Spirit-filled worship would transcend temple, priesthood, and sacrificial systems.

This encounter foreshadows Pentecost when the Spirit would be poured out on all believers, making geography irrelevant for worship. The early church understood this, gathering in homes rather than temples (Acts 2:46). For first-century readers, this verse justified abandoning temple-centered Judaism for Spirit-empowered Christian worship.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does understanding God's spiritual nature challenge our tendency toward materialistic or superficial worship?
2. In what ways might our worship fall short of being 'in spirit and in truth,' and how can we address this?

3. How does Jesus as the Truth and the Spirit's indwelling work together to enable genuine worship?
4. What false dichotomies between 'spiritual' worship and 'truthful' worship do modern Christians sometimes create?
5. How should this verse shape our approach to corporate worship gatherings and personal devotional life?

Interlinear Text

πνεύματι	ὁ	θεός	καὶ	τοὺς	προσκυνεῖν	αὐτὸν	ἐν
is a Spirit	G3588	God	and	G3588	they that worship	him	him in
G4151		G2316	G2532		G4352	G846	G1722

πνεύματι	καὶ	ἀληθείᾳ	δεῖ	προσκυνεῖν
is a Spirit	and	in truth	must	they that worship
G4151	G2532	G225	G1163	G4352

Additional Cross-References

2 Corinthians 3:17 (Spirit): Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

Philippians 3:3 (Spirit): For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

Psalms 51:17 (Spirit): The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

Isaiah 57:15 (Spirit): For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

1 Samuel 16:7 (Parallel theme): But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.

Psalms 66:18 (Parallel theme): If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me:

1 Timothy 1:17 (References God): Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Psalms 50:23 (Worship): Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.

2 Corinthians 1:12 (References God): For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.

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