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Worship: *An Analysis of the* *Greek Word Proskyneō*

Part 4 of 5

Classical Greek: προσκυνέω (*proskyneō*)

The true worshippers worship by the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus. The origin of προσκυνέω (*proskyneō*, fall down and worship, bow down to, show reverence to, welcome respectfully. In addition, this word also, in Classical Greek, conveys the concept as: “lives in the ancient custom of putting one’s hand on one’s mouth in a kissing gesture and then extending the hand toward a person of higher status, especially deity.”¹ This word precedes Greek history. For example, reliefs in Egypt exhibit worshippers with outstretched hands **throwing a kiss** (κυνέω, *kyneō*, “to kiss”) **to** (πρός, *pros*, “towards”) **deity**.² Also, among the Greeks, the verb is a term for the adoration of the Gods.³ Later *proskyneō* was utilized in reference to deification of rulers and the Roman emperor cult.⁴ Not only did the word refer to the external act of prostrating oneself in worship, but also represented the corresponding inward attitude of reverence and humility.⁵

¹Thoralf Gilbrant, International Editor, *The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary*, Pi-Rho, Word Numbers 3664-4374, The Complete Biblical Library (Springfield, Missouri: World Library Press, Inc.), 339.

²See Colin Brown, General Editor, *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol., 2, s.v. “προσκυνέω,” by H. Schonweiss, C. Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 876.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

Septuagint Greek: προσκυνέω (*proskyneō*)

In the LXX, the verb chiefly translates intensive forms of the Hebrew word **הִשָּׁתַּחֲוֶה** (*šā·hā(h)*, “bow down, worship”).⁶ Moses uses this word as he recounts the episode between Joseph and his brother:

Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. “Listen,” he said, “I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down (**προσεκύνουν**, *prosekynoun*⁷) to me.”¹⁰ When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, “What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down (**προσκυνήσαι**, *proskynēsai*⁸) to the ground before you?” (Genesis 37:9-10)

The same Hebrew word is employed by the author of Second Kings (same as Kings 4 in the LXX) in describing Israel’s devotion to other gods in addition to Yahweh (Jehovah). For example, the author of Second Kings writes:

They worshiped the LORD, but they also served their own gods in accordance with the customs of the nations from which they had been brought.³⁴ To this day they persist in their former practices. They neither worship the LORD nor adhere to the decrees and ordinances, the laws and commands that the LORD gave the descendants of Jacob, whom he named Israel.³⁵ When the LORD made a covenant with the Israelites, he commanded them: “Do not worship (**προσκυνήσετε**, *proskynēsete*⁹) any other gods or bow down to them, serve them or sacrifice to them.³⁶ But the LORD, who brought you up out of Egypt with mighty power and outstretched arm, is the one you must worship. To him you shall bow down (**προσκυνήσετε**, *proskynēsete*) and to him offer sacrifices.” (2 Kings 17:33-36)

הִשָּׁתַּחֲוֶה (*šā·hā(h)*, “bow down, worship”) may be used to show respect and honor to a person in a high position. In the narrative of Joseph and Esau, Moses writes concerning Jacob’s reverence toward his brother Esau: “He himself went on ahead and bowed down (**προσεκύνησεν**, *prosekynēsen*¹⁰) to the ground seven times as he approached his brother” [Genesis 33:3]. Once more, when Joseph’s brothers arrived in Egypt to purchase grain, the readers are informed that upon approaching him: “Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the one who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph’s brothers arrived, they bowed down (**προσεκύνησεν**, *prosekynēsen*) to him with their faces to the ground” [42:6]. In other words, his brothers demonstrated respect and honor to the governor of the land.

⁶The term used to identify this form of the Hebrew word is **hithpael**. Hithpael is one of the characteristics of the Hebrew stem. **It is the intensive reflexive** (middle voice). On the other hand, if one says that “he killed,” then that is the **simple active (qal)**; if one says, “He was killed,” then that is the **simple passive (niphal)**. If one says, “he killed” (brutally), then that is the **intensive active (piel)**; and, finally, if one says, “He killed himself,” then that form is **intensive reflexive (hithpael)**.

⁷From **προσκυνέω** (*proskyneō*); verb: third person, plural, imperfect, active, indicative—“worship.”

⁸From **προσκυνέω** (*proskyneō*); verb: aorist, active, infinitive.

⁹From **προσκυνέω** (*proskyneō*); verb: second person, plural, future, active, indicative.

¹⁰From **προσκυνέω** (*proskyneō*); verb: third person, singular, aorist, active, indicative,

Also, during one of Saul’s expeditions to capture David, David had an occasion to cut off a corner of Saul’s robe. Following this incident, the author of First Samuel writes: “Then David went out of the cave and called out to Saul, ‘My lord the king!’ When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down (**προσεκύνησεν**, *prosekynēsen*) and prostrated himself with his face to the ground” [1 Samuel 24:9—in the LXX, 24:9]. It is noteworthy that three-quarters of the occurrences of *proskunew* in the LXX refer to the worship of the one true God of Israel or the false gods of paganism. Whenever God spoke and revealed Himself to the Israelites, they worshiped God. The Israelites reacted in grateful worship for His deeds on their behalf. One such example is that of Abraham. Moses, in recording this event, informs his readers that Abraham’s servant bowed down and worshiped the Lord following the successful trip to find a wife for Isaac:

Then the man bowed down and worshiped (**προσεκύνησεν**, *prosekynēsen*) the LORD, ²⁷ saying, “Praise be to the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master. As for me, the LORD has led me on the journey to the house of my master’s relatives.” (Genesis 24:26-27)

Following the institution of the Passover, the people respond with worship. Moses says, “It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians. Then the people bowed down and worshiped” (**προσεκύνησεν**, *prosekynēsen*) [Exodus 12:27]. Whenever the Israelites bowed to the earth, it symbolizes their submission to Yahweh. Again, we observe this kind of worship when Solomon dedicated the Temple. In this dedication, we observe that the Temple is filled with the glory of the Lord. And, as a result, the people responded by worshipping the Lord. The author of Second Chronicles describes the events this way:

When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. ² The priests could not enter the temple of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled it. ³ When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the LORD above the temple, they knelt on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped (**προσεκύνησαν**, *prosekynēsan*) and gave thanks to the LORD, saying, “He is good; his love endures forever.” (2 Chronicles 7:1-4)

The people respond by bowing face down upon the ground, thus they worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord. Just as the original Tabernacle was built in the wilderness, so God too designed the Temple. The author of the Book of Hebrews refers to the guidelines set forth for the worship of the children of Israel. For example, view his comments: “They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: ‘See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain’” (Hebrews 8:5). My conclusions concerning worship in Israel are set forth very concisely in the following comments:

When the Lord gave Israel His law on Mount Sinai, He instituted some basic guidelines for worship. The sacrificial and priestly systems became the prime expression of the exalted and holy nature of God and of His desire for a people who would worship Him in humility and truth.¹¹

New Testament Greek: προσκυνέω (*proskyneō*)

In the New Testament the verb **προσκυνέω** (*proskyneō*) occurs fifty-nine times, of which twenty-four are found in the Book of Revelation, eleven in the Gospel of John, and nine in the Gospel of Matthew. The Old Testament sense is taken up in the New Testament, but with further development. For instance, John writes about an event that he experienced when he heard a voice from heaven declaring the reign of God. In this scene, he writes: “At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, ‘Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship (**προσκύνησον**, *proskynēson*¹²) God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” [Revelation 19:10]. Even after this encounter with the angelic host, he again found himself willing “to bow” before an angel. He calls attention to this episode in his letter:

I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship (**προσκυνήσαι**, *proskynēsai*) at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. ⁹ But he said to me, “Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship (**προσκύνησον**, *proskynēson*) God!” (22:8-9).

The thought, or idea, behind the word **προσκυνέω** (*proskyneō*) is the concept of *obeisance*. For example, when the Magi seek to worship Jesus, the contemplation is that He is a king. Matthew records the conversation of the Magi with some in Jerusalem: “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship (**προσκυνήσαι**, *proskynēsai*) him” [Matthew 2:2]. Sometimes worship may not be explicitly stated, but implicitly suggested. Such is the case in the centurion’s response to Jesus concerning the healing of his son. Matthew records the centurion’s conversation with Jesus:

The centurion replied, “Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed.”⁹ For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” (Matthew 8:8-9)

Then, Jesus’ response to this soldier is just as revealing:

When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, “I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.”¹¹ I say to you that many will come from the

¹¹Gilbrant, *The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary*, 15: 340.

¹²From **προσκυνέω** (*proskyneō*); verb: second person, singular, aorist, active, imperative—“to do reverence to.”

east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. (8:10-11)

We observe that there is worship on the part of the centurion, even though it is not explicitly stated. On the other hand, Matthew relates an incident that resulted in worship when Jesus walks on water:

During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear. ²⁷ But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” ²⁸ “Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.” ²⁹ “Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!” ³¹ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?” ³² And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³ Then those who were in the boat worshiped (*προσεκύνησαν, prosekynēsan*) him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.” (14:25-33)

John also tells the story of a man born blind that Jesus heals. And, as a result of this healing, the man accepts Jesus. This belief results in adoration. John captures the inward part of this man’s attitude toward Jesus in his relating this encounter: “Then the man said, ‘Lord, I believe,’ and he worshiped (*προσεκύνησεν, prosekynēsen*) him” [John 9:38]. Schonweiss and Brown make the following succinct observation about Jesus’ encounter with the healed man: “In John 9:38 obeisance is nothing less than the outward reflex action of faith: to believe means to adore Jesus, to recognize him as Lord, to render him homage as king.”¹³ This commentary on the part of these two authors is an excellent explanation of what is involved in the verb *proskunew*.

More light is shed on the word *proskunew* in Matthew’s account of the temptation of Jesus. In the temptation of Jesus, Satan desires obeisance, deference, homage, honor, respect, and reverence that belong to God alone. Satan says to Jesus, “‘All this I will give you,’ he said, ‘if you will bow down and worship (*προσκυνήσης, proskynēsēs*¹⁴) me” [Matthew 4:9]. But Jesus responds by saying: “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship (*προσκυνήσεις, proskunhseis*) the Lord your God, and serve (*λατρεύσεις, latreuseis*) him only” [4:10]. Again, this conversation between Jesus and Satan also sheds light on the parameters of this word *προσκυνέω (proskyneō)*. This kind of worship has to do with one’s way of life in devotion to the Creator. **One might well ask: Is this worship limited to a so-called worship service on Sunday morning?**

This citation of Scripture by Jesus (Matthew 4:10) is one of the strongest Scriptures that support the deity of Christ. Since one can only worship God, then Jesus must also be God. Jesus is worshiped from the very beginning of Matthew’s narrative. It is in this same regard that the author of the Book of Hebrews intimates the deity of Jesus:

¹³Brown, *The New International dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 2:877.

¹⁴From *προσκυνέω (proskyneō)*; verb; second person, singular, aorist, active, subjunctive.

And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, “Let all God’s angels worship (**προσκυνήσατον**, *proskynēsaton*¹⁵) him.”⁷ In speaking of the angels he says, “He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire.”⁸ But about the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom.”⁹ You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.” (Hebrews 1:6-9)

The Book of Revelation also recognizes God in all His power and glory as Creator and Judge. In this book, our attention is called to the necessity of worship. The call to conversion can be put in the form of worship. Listen to John as he insists upon dedication of service: “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship (**προσκυνήσατε**, *proskynēsate*¹⁶) him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water” [Revelation 14:7]. Every nation is called upon to worship God. Man’s gratefulness is expressed to God in worship or adoration. The fourth chapter of Revelation reveals how the twenty-four elders responded to “him who sits on the throne, and worship (**προσκυνεῖ**, *proskynei*) him who lives for ever and ever” [4:9].

Again, John further describes the elders that fell down before the Lamb in the fifth chapter of Revelation. As John writes about this graphic scene of worship, he gives some insight as to the nature of worship:

And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. **Each one had a harp** and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.⁹ And **they sang a new song**: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.” (Revelation 5:8-9)

From the above citation, we may assert that worship may consist of specific acts of worship directed toward God through song, prayer, and so on. **Yet, these acts do not indicate that God has established a so-called worship service on Sunday morning with five rituals. The demand for a worship service and regulation of a worship service with five acts to be performed on Sunday morning did not originate with God, but originated with man.**¹⁷ Since worship is now confined to the four walls within a building, then we, as a whole, are not conscious that worship that is pleasing to God is in presenting our bodies as living sacrifices to God (Roman 12:1-2). Paul expresses worship this way:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to **offer your bodies** as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—**this is your spiritual act of worship**.² Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1-2)

¹⁵From **προσκυνέω** (*proskyneō*); verb: third person, plural, aorist, active, imperative.

¹⁶From **προσκυνέω** (*proskyneō*); verb: second person, plural, aorist, active, imperative.

¹⁷For an excellent discussion of these relevant points, see the discussion of acts of worship between Buff Scott and Gary Workman: Buff Scott, Jr., “Acts of Worship,” in *The Reformer* 9, no. 5 (September/October 1993): 3-7.

The subject of Christian worship is still very difficult for us, as believers, to grasp. It is almost impossible for God's people **not** to identify worship with what we do on Sunday morning. It is still true that the "faith of our fathers" is the watchword of orthodoxy. Our presuppositions about worship still color our interpretation of the Scriptures that speak of worship. For many devout and sincere Christians, the Scriptures are extremely clear in this area of the traditional worship service, that is to say, the belief that God has established a structured worship service with rituals to be performed on Sunday morning. On the other hand, this concept of a structured worship service is not equally plain to all. Nevertheless, the above text can serve as a window through which we can peer into a heavenly scene. To illustrate the difficulty that many Christians experience in interpreting certain texts about worship, Gary Workman, American preacher and teacher in Russia, is called forth to see the dilemma that he and many others experience in grappling with the subject of worship. For example, **Workman** cites a number of passages that employs the following terminology:

And it shall come to pass, *that* from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh **come to worship** before me, saith the LORD. (Isaiah 66:23, KJV)

And it shall come to pass, *that* every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even **go up from year to year to worship** the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. (Zechariah 14:16, KJV)

And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and **had come to Jerusalem for to worship.** (Acts 8:27, KJV)

From these Scriptures, he reasons: "Nor did the nature of worship change with the advent of the Christian age. Paul said, 'I went up to worship at Jerusalem' Acts 24:11."¹⁸ But Workman is not the only one confused concerning a so-called "public worship" service. Other Christians—outside the Church of Christ denomination—in writing about **προσκυνέω** (*proskyneō*), too, identify this concept of worship with what one does on Sunday morning. For instance, H. Schonweiss and C. Brown write: "Where *proskyneō* is used absolutely it means to share in public worship, to offer prayers (e.g. Jn 12:20; Acts 8:27; 24:11), when, in Rev., *proskyneō* comes to denote a particular kind of prayer, namely adoration."¹⁹

At first glance, Workman appears to be correct in his analysis of "going to worship," but upon closer inspection, we discover fallacies in his line of reasoning. **First of all**, the Scriptures he cites have to do with worship in the Jewish age, not the worship of John 4:24, that is to say, worship in the Messianic age. **It seems that Workman has jumped to a number of unjustified conclusions with the passages he relies upon for his concept of worship.** For example, he seeks to explain these Scriptures to substantiate the belief that Jesus ordains a structured worship service with five prescribed rituals to replace the prescribed rituals in the Temple. **This error, on the part of Workman, is not an intentional misunderstanding.** We

¹⁸Workman, "What Is Worship?," *The Spiritual Sword* 24, no. 2 (January 1993): 9

¹⁹Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 2:877.

should rethink the subject of worship very carefully in light of the context of the Scriptures. We must not rely upon traditions to uphold our previous concept of public worship. Upon the initial reading of Workman's article, I paused to see if he had a valid point. But upon further consideration of his argument, there appears to be a break down in his suppositions. His remarks have no basis to support his conclusions. In spite of Workman's scholarship, the data do not prop up his deductions. To illustrate the dilemma of scholarship, observe the following quotations from Scripture, some of which Workman also relies upon:

And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship (προσκυνήσωσιν, *proskynēsōsin*) at the feast. (John 12:20)

And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship [προσκυνήσων, *proskynēsōn*]. (Acts 8:27)

You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship [προσκυνήσων, *proskynēsōn*]. (Acts 24:11)

The presuppositions associated with these citations must be reexamined in light of John 4:24. The first incidence cited above (John 12:20) has nothing to do with the "worship service" in the Messianic age. The Greeks going up to Jerusalem to worship had nothing to do with the concept of worship that Jesus speaks of in John 4:24. It is in this same vein that Luke informs his readers, as cited above, about the activities of the Ethiopian eunuch prior to his conversion: "This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship." This episode involved Jewish worship at the Temple, not the worship of John 4:24. The third citation is a reference to the speech of Paul wherein he told Governor Felix about his going up to Jerusalem to worship. This activity on the part of Paul was associated with the Temple, not a Christian assembly with a structured worship service with five ritualistic acts performed in a prescribed manner. John 12:20, Acts 8:27, and Acts 24:11 refer to activities at the Temple, not a Sunday morning worship service.

If the writers for *The Spiritual Sword*, an extremely radical Church of Christ journal, had lived in Paul's day, they would have written him up for apostasy. The very idea of a Christian going up to the Temple to offer up sacrifices for purification according to the Law of Moses, especially where they had a choir and musical instruments to praise God. Luke narrates a conversation that took place between Paul and James (the Lord's brother) over this affair. He writes:

When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly. ¹⁸ The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹ Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. ²⁰ When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. ²¹ They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. ²² What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, ²³ so do what we tell you. **There are four men with us who have made a vow. ²⁴ Take these men, join in**

their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. ²⁵ As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.” ²⁶ **The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.** (Acts 21:17-26)

A cursory glance of the above citations reveals that the Scriptures cited relate to Jewish worship, not a structured Christian worship service with its five rituals. It is significant that in John 4:24, Jesus says worship will **not** be the same as the worship in Jerusalem. Yet, in spite of what Jesus says, Christians still try to get a prearranged worship service with five rituals out of this passage. Listen to Jesus as He talks with the woman of Samaria:

Jesus declared, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ **Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth,** for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:21-24)

We seldom ask what Jesus meant by His response to the woman. Many just want to know how to respond to those who do not accept Jesus’ words as laying the foundation for another **structured** worship service. This Scripture is one of the most frequently cited Scriptures by the proponents for a “worship service.” As we peruse, or pay particular attention to, John 4:24 and its context, we quickly determine that not all plain teaching is equally plain to all. It is not uncommon for God’s people **not** to hear the Word of God accurately, which includes me. One difficulty that many Christians experience within the Churches of Christ is with the phrase “in spirit and truth” (ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ, *en pneumati kai alētheia*). Many commentators have tried to explain the phrase with a fascinating diversity of results.

To illustrate the enigma of the phrase “in spirit and truth,” We only have to read various articles in *The Spiritual Sword* on worship to discover the mystery in these words. In the January 1993 issue of *The Spiritual Sword*, we can read articles on worship by Alan E. Highers, Gary Workman, Wayne Jackson, Bobby Duncan, William Woodson, Roy H. Lanier, Jr., Wendell Winkler, Edwin S. Jones, Tom Holland, and Jim Laws—all advocates of the so-called structured worship service with its five acts. Having said this, nevertheless, all of these men are defenders of the faith—faith in Jesus as the Savior of the world. Every one of these men, as far as I know, believes that the Word of God is applicable to every area of our lives. All of these men have many good things to say about worship, but, at the same time, they fail to recognize the import of John 4:24.

It appears, so it seems to me, that none of these men really understood or understand what Jesus is talking about when they apply the phrase to a worship service. **Wayne Jackson** attempts to settle the debate in his article dealing with John 4:24, but he has to jump to a number of unjustified conclusions to accomplish his goal. He explains:

Thus, what is the meaning of “truth” in John 4:24? Advocates of the “no-regulated-worship” concept argue for the subjective sense of *aletheia* in John 4:24. In so doing, they divorce themselves from the best of New Testament scholarship, and also from a strong body of biblical evidence.... True worship is that which accords with reality, which men grasp on the basis of revelation.²⁰

Jackson cites Colin Brown, professor of systematic theology at Fuller Theological Seminary,²¹ to substantiate that “True worship is that which accords with reality, which men grasp on the basis of revelation.”²² Perhaps, this assertion is correct, but Jackson’s application of this declaration to a structured worship service to fit his “pattern/blueprint theology”²³ is totally unwarranted. In my opinion, his arguments are not successful, because, undoubtedly, he himself did not grasp the intent of Brown, who in turn quoted C. H. Dodd (1884-1973), Welsh New Testament scholar and Protestant theologian, in defining truth. Brown’s comments are to the point:

Those who worship God in Spirit and in truth (4:23, 24) are not those who worship in sincerity and inwardness. The Samaritans are not criticized for lacking sincerity. True worship is that which accords with reality, which men grasp on the basis of revelation. The phrase *ἐν ἀληθείᾳ* [*en alētheia*] as C. H. Dodd rightly insists, means “on the plane of reality” (*The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 1953, 175). It is on the plane of *ta onta* [“form”] as distinct from *eidōla* or *phantasiai* [“visible”]. Hence it is associated with the Holy Spirit.²⁴

Brown does not corroborate Jackson’s interpretation of a *blueprint*, or *pattern*, worship service of five acts. Brown’s “plane of reality” has to do **not** with *form* or that which is *visible*, but with *being* or with the *Holy Spirit*. This is the very opposite of what Jackson is advancing with his five acts of worship, which consists of *form*. If Jackson is correct in his understanding of “in spirit and truth,” we cannot help but wonder why God did not specify that kind of worship with a clear-cut blueprint, or pattern, for the Christian assembly? Brown’s comments are antithetical to Jackson’s interpretation. For Jackson, he advocates worship in the Messianic age that is in essence the kind of worship that Jesus said would cease to exist. **Jackson has simply substituted new rituals for the old rituals.**

If we interpret “in spirit and truth” as correct application of the Scriptures, then should we not assume that the Israelites did not have to adhere to the instructions concerning Temple worship? On the other hand, if we interpret “in spirit and truth” as having reference to an attitude of the heart, then we must wonder if God was not concerned about the attitude of the

²⁰Wayne Jackson, “Worship in Truth: A Study of John 4:24,” *The Spiritual Sword* 24, no. 2 (January 1993): 11.

²¹See Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1978), vol. 3. S.v., “Truth,” by A. C. Thiselton: 891.

²²Jackson, “Worship in Truth,” *The Spiritual Sword*, 11.

²³For an in-depth study on pattern theology, see Dallas Burdette, “Oddities in Pattern Theology,” in Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon, 2009), 55-86.

²⁴Brown, *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3:891. In the parenthesis, I added “form” and “visible” to assist those who may not be familiar with the Greek words employed in this article.

heart in Israel’s performance of the rituals in the Temple. Were not the Revelation of God and a proper attitude of the heart essential in the Old Testament? What was the contrast between the “then” and the “now”? In other words, is God concerned about the heart today, but not then? Has not God always required the heart along with correct application of His commands? Just what is the contrast in John 4:24? Is it correct to say that God now requires correct understanding and a different attitude of the heart than He did in the Old Testament?

Has there ever been a time—old or new—that God has not required sincerity and inwardness in our relationship to God? In fact, C. H. Dodd cites Psalms 145:18 to demonstrate that “sincerity and inwardness” has always been a part of our worship. Listen to the psalmist as he explains: “The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth (ἐν ἀληθείᾳ (*en alētheia*²⁵)).” While we may not agree with Dodd on many points, yet, he seems correct when he refutes the interpretation that Jesus means “sincere and steadfast reliance upon Him.” In John 4:24, consider the following insightful comments that Dodd offers in clarifying the meaning of this much disputed passage:

This cannot be the meaning of the Johannine passage. There is no contrast between those whose approach to God is supported by a firm faith and those who lack faith. The ἀληθινοὶ προσκυνῆται (*alēthinoi proskynētai*, true worshipers] are those who are aware that God is πνεῦμα [*pneuma*, “spirit”] and accordingly worship Him ἐν πνεύματι [*en pneumatī*, “in spirit”]; and they are contrasted with those who by confining His presence to Jerusalem or to Gerizim show that they do not realize His natures as πνεῦμα [*pneuma*, “spirit”]. The contrast may be compared with that drawn in the Epistle to the Hebrews (viii. 1-7, etc.) between the σκιά (*skia*, “a shadow, darkness, shade: contrasted with the body casting the shadow, and used met. somewhat like a pale reflexion”) of the Levitical ritual and the σκηνῆς τῆς ἀληθινῆς [*skēnēs tēs alēthinēs*, “of the true ten”] in which the real sacrifice is offered. Ἐν ἀληθείᾳ [*En alētheia*, in truth] therefore means ‘on the plane of reality’, i.e. of *ta onta* [“being”] as distinct from *eidōla* [“form”] or *phantasiai* [“visible”].²⁶

If “in truth” is interpreted correctly according to Dodd and Brown, then their “plane of reality,” refers to the spiritual aspects (“in Spirit.”), not rituals. Both Brown and Dodd maintain that “true worship” is on a spiritual plane, not on a carnal plane. In other words, worship in the eschatological age does not consist in ritual with visible forms, but in the Holy Spirit. This view is diametrically opposite of worship in patterns, that is, five acts. This worship is “in truth,” that is to say, in Jesus. To say that worship “in Spirit and Truth” is “in and through” Jesus is not to deny that we express our worship in presenting our bodies as “living sacrifices” (Romans 12:1), which is, according to Paul, our “spiritual act of worship” (12:1).

CONCLUSION

From our previous (Study # 4), we called attention to the New Testament use of five verbs and three nouns that radiate some light concerning the meaning of worship. The verbs are:

²⁵*Septuaginta*, (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart) 1979.

²⁶C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1968): 175. I have transliterated (last three words) his Greek words to facilitate the ease of the average person in comprehending the Greek words.

σέβομαι (*sebomai*), σεβάζομαι (*sebazomai*), λατρεύω (*latreuō*), εὐσεβέω (*eusebeō*), and προσκυνέω (*proskyneō*). The nouns are: σέβασμα (*sebasma*), ἑθελοθησκεία (*ethelothrēskeia*), and θρησκεία (*thrēskeia*). We are impressed that none of these words is ever associated directly with what Christians do when they assemble as a corporate body. In other words, none of the above words is employed with a so-called worship service performed on Sunday morning with five prescribed rituals.

What we do observe is that true worship is **not** associated with five prescribed rituals or in a geographical location. The true worshiper offers worship to God that is now “in and through” Jesus and a life led by the Spirit of God. In conclusion, we must ask several questions: Are believers today similar in their concept of worship as manifested to the woman of Samaria? Have we failed to grasp the meaning of the “**now**” for the Messianic age? Do we really accept what Jesus said about worship? If not, why not?

Our next study (no. 5) examines, in detail, the meaning of John 4:24. This Scripture is frequently cited by many sincere and devout Christian to justify their particular brand of orthodoxy concerning a so-called pattern for a ritualistic worship service. The words *spirit* and *truth* are employed in such a way as to promote a legalistic set pattern for worship, which worship is located in a particular geographical location within certain time frames, which generally includes singing without the instrument.