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Worship: *An Analysis of John 4:24*

True worshipers worship by the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus. The current interpretation of John 4:24 does not seem to be in harmony with the context. Generally, the phrase “in spirit and truth” is associated with the Bible as inspired by the Holy Spirit. In other words, one draws certain conclusions from the Bible as given by the Holy Spirit concerning worship (five prescriptive acts) and any deviation from the so-called *blueprint* is not worshipping according to the “truth.” This interpretation (five prescriptive acts) will not allow Christians to fellowship other Christians when their views differ over the so-called prescriptive worship service. Today, the Churches of Christ, as a whole, are like a war zone. There is fighting on every street corner. Christians will not fellowship other Christians if they participate in Sunday school, wine in the communion, breaking bread in the communion, individual cups in the communion, singing with instrumental accompaniment, and so on. These issues are just a sampling of the many causes of division. If God had ordained prescribed rituals to be performed in a set pattern, then no one could deviate from the *blueprint* without incurring the wrath of God. But God did not ordain a worship service as is commonly advanced today among God’s people.

The concept in John 4:24 is similar to the idea that Jesus related to the Jews in John 8:22-36. In John 8:32, Jesus informs the Jews: “you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” It is not uncommon for many Christians to interpret “the truth will set you free” as synonymous with the Word of God (the written Revelation). Both phrases—“In truth” and “the truth will set you free”—are associated with God’s written Revelation known as the New Testament writings. But, is Jesus saying that the Bible will set you free? Surely the answer is an unqualified “no.” The context is the key to unravel this oft-misunderstood phrase—“the truth will set you free.” In verse 36, Jesus explains: “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” The words *truth* and *Son* are synonymous. Jesus sets one free. Through Jesus one is sanctified.¹

¹See Dallas Burdette, “The Truth Will Set You Free,” in Dallas Burdette, *Old Texts through New Eyes* (Xulon: Longwood, FL, 2009), 383-405, for a detailed study of this often abused text.

Once more, worship that is acceptable to God in the eschatological age is not through the Temple in Jerusalem, not through rituals, but through the Messiah. In the Messianic age, worship is never defined as rituals. One never reads that the church is the place where worship takes place on Sunday morning. One never reads where the Apostles say they are “going to worship” in reference to the Christian assembly. The concept that worship that is acceptable to God in the eschatological age is expressed by the author of the Hebrews letter: “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body” (Hebrews 10:19-20).

Repetition may be pardoned here, for the minds of God’s people are leavened by the traditional concept of worship, which prevails in Christendom. The concept of worship in John 4:24 is undermined or openly denied by many defenders of faith in Jesus. Even though many Christians speak of a worship service for the eschatological age, nevertheless, the Scriptures do not even hint of such a thing. There is not a written Revelation for a worship service as is presently advocated by Gary Workman and Wayne Jackson² for the Christian community. We cannot allow our appreciation for these two men to prevent us from dissenting emphatically from their teaching concerning a worship service.³

As we return to the discussion among the current worship in Jerusalem, the worship on Mount Gerizim, or the phrase “a time is coming and has now come” (John 4:23), we are confronted with the question: What is the contrast that Jesus is making between the Mosaic age and the Messianic age? Just what did Jesus mean by His dissimilarity? Did He insinuate that the worship commanded by God to the Israelites was not to be “sincere and inward”? Is Jesus saying that “now” Christians will worship with a worship that is now sincere and inward? Is Jesus now saying in John 4:24 that in the “now” age there is to be a new set of rituals—a ritual of five acts to be performed on Sunday morning? Is Jesus informing the woman of Samaria that in the eschatological age that the rituals will change to preaching, singing, praying, giving, and communion?

Raymond Brown (1928-1998), American Roman Catholic priest and biblical scholar, explains “in spirit and truth” this way:

Today most exegetes agree that in proclaiming worship in Spirit and truth, Jesus is not contrasting external worship with internal worship. His statement has nothing to do with worshiping God in the inner recesses of one’s own spirit; for the Spirit of God, not the spirit of man, as vs. 24 makes clear. In fact, one could almost regard “Spirit and truth” as hendiadys⁴ (see Note on vs. 23) equivalent to “Spirit of truth.” An ideal of purely internal worship ill fits the NT scene with its eucharistic

²Both of these men are members of the Churches of Christ. My comments are not to castigate these men of God, but rather to call attention to their misunderstanding of the nature of worship. I, too, held to these same views for the first twenty-one years of my ministry.

³For a detailed study of worship and division within the Churches of Christ, see Dallas Burdette, “Congregational Worship and Division,” in Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Xulon: Longwood, FL., 2008), 171-180.

⁴Hendiadys is a figure in which a single complex idea is expressed by two words or structures, usually connected by a conjunction. For example, “weary and worn” may mean “very tired.”

gatherings, hymn singing, baptism in water, etc. (unless one assumes that John's theology is markedly different from that of the Church at large).⁵

Another well-known scholar, Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976), German theologian of Lutheran background, also says, correctly, that “the cultic worship of God is contrasted, not with a spiritual, inward form of worship, but with the eschatological worship.”⁶ Just a perusal of this pericope (John 4:19-26), reveals that the woman of Samaria puts the alternative to Jesus concerning the “where” of worship: “this mountain” or “Jerusalem” (4:20). Jesus responds to the woman by rejecting the “where” by contrasting her concept of worship with the future worship of the Messianic age. He informs her that the Jewish and non-Jewish worship will cease to be of importance: “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem” (4:21).

Jesus is saying “a time is coming” (ἔρχεται ὥρα, *erchetai hōra*) in which “the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth” (4:23). In other words, there will no longer be any Temple, either in Jerusalem or Samaria. The same truth is set forth in the Book of Revelation: “I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (Revelation 21:22). With the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, we witness the new concept of “in Spirit and truth.” Jesus, in his conversation with the woman of Samaria, tells how this eschatological time and its worship of God are to be understood. Bultmann says that these two terms are mutually explanatory: “For the eschatological hour comes only with the Revealer and his word.”⁷

The testimony of Jesus in John 4:23 is similar to what He declares earlier: “This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). In other words, this eschatological hour is “now” here, that is to say, “Light has come into the world.” Again, this same truth is set forth in John 5:25: “I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come [καὶ νῦν ἐστίν, *kai nyn estin*, “and NOW is”] when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.” It is also significant that we find John 4:24 sandwiched between John 3:19 and John 5:24.

Correspondingly, the terms *Spirit* and *Truth* are employed in John to bring out the fact that the eschatological age has been brought about by the miracle of God's revelation in Jesus.⁸ Bultmann correctly points out: “τό πνεῦμα [*to pneuma*, “the spirit”] is God's miraculous dealing with men which takes place in revelation.”⁹ The words “in spirit and truth” follow another conversation that took place earlier in Chapter 3 of the Gospel of John. John records a conversation that took place between Jesus and Nicodemus:

Jesus answered, I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit (πνεύματος *pneumatos*).⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit (πνεύματος, *pneumatos*) gives birth to spirit.⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born

⁵Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, Anchor Bible 29 (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 180.

⁶Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 190.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

again.’⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit (**πνεύματος**, *pneumatos*). [John 3:5-8]

In Chapter 3 of the Book of John, Jesus introduces Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, to the Holy Spirit’s role in the rebirth. In Chapter 4, Jesus presents to the woman of Samaria the role of the Holy Spirit in the concept of worship for the Messianic age. Then, in Chapter 7, Jesus declares:

Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.³⁹ By this he meant the Spirit (**πνεύματος**, *pneumatos*), whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit (pneu'ma, pneuma) had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified. (7:38-39)

Just a perusal of these three chapters (four, five, and seven) of John’s Gospel seem to indicate that the Holy Spirit is involved in every operation of the Christian life. When we are born from above and have received the Holy Spirit, then our worship will be “in Spirit and Truth.” Paul’s language in his epistle to Titus is similar to the thoughts expressed by Jesus to Nicodemus:

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared,⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the **washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit** (**πνεύματος**, *pneumatos*),⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior,⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:4-7)

As we read these words of Paul, we must reflect upon the words of Ezekiel in his great prophecy about Israel’s restoration/resurrection from captivity. The **water of purification** and **the Spirit** occupied an important place in Jewish hopes—a prophecy that Nicodemus was ignorant about. This unawareness called forth a rebuke from Jesus: “‘You are Israel’s teacher,’ said Jesus, ‘and do you not understand these things?’” (John 3:10). Just what was the prophecy in Ezekiel? Listen as the Spirit speaks through the prophet:

I will **sprinkle clean water** on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols.²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.²⁷ And **I will put my Spirit in you** and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. (Ezekiel 36:25-27)

According to Ezekiel, God says, “I will sprinkle clean water on you” and “I will put my Spirit in you.” This would be in the future. Although God gathered Israel out of all countries and brought them into their own land (36:25), they were still “dry bones.” They are still likened in the next chapter to dry bones lying on the ground. How could these dry bones live? Ezekiel answers by saying:

Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’”¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.¹¹ Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’¹² Therefore prophecy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: O my people, **I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel.**’¹³ Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them.¹⁴ **I will put my Spirit in you** and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.” (37:9-14)

These citations from Ezekiel are equivalent to the “washing of rebirth” [λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας, *loutrou palingenesias*] (Titus 3:5) and the “renewal by the Holy Spirit” [ἀνακαινώσεως πνεύματος ἁγίου, *anakainōseōs pneumatōs hagiou*] (3:5). This regeneration is as a result of the blood-shedding of Jesus, never to be repeated, and it is only by the living and eternally abiding Word of God (Jesus) and the outpouring of God’s Spirit that we experience the new birth. For Peter, the new birth comes about through Jesus: “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living (ζῶντος, *zōntos*) and enduring (μένοντος, *menontos*¹⁰) word (λόγου, *logou*) of God” (1 Peter 1:23). Peter is not writing about the written revelation (ῥῆμα, *rhēma*, “word”). For example, he writes: “but the word (ῥῆμα, *rhēma*) of the Lord stands” (1:25). Peter makes a distinction between the living word (λόγου ζῶντος, *logou zōntos*) and the written word (ῥῆμα, *rhēma*).

In the Ephesian letter, Paul speaks of the Spirit as the seal which guarantees our eternal inheritance:

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit (πνεύματι, *pneumati*),¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:13-14)

We may not understand the full implication of the Spirit’s role in the life of the believer, but, perhaps, we can gain some insight from the author of the Book of Hebrews concerning Jesus’ offering of Himself for our redemption:

How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit (πνεύματος, *pneumatōs*) offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! (Hebrews 9:14)

Even though we may not be certain as to the exact meaning or intention of the author, nevertheless, a comparison of other Scriptures sheds some light about the Spirit’s involvement in the ministry of Jesus. For example, Luke narrates an event that transpired in Nazareth in one of their local synagogues wherein Jesus read from Isaiah:

¹⁰ From μένω (*menō*, “to stay, abide, remain”); verb, present, active, participle, masculine, singular, genitive.

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:18-19)

In seeking to call attention to the Holy Spirit's function in the life of Jesus, Luke again calls attention to the Holy Spirit's role in the temptation scene of Jesus by Satan: "Jesus, **full of the Holy Spirit**, returned from the Jordan and was **led by the Spirit** in the desert" (4:1). And Luke also speaks of Jesus' ministry in Galilee: "Jesus returned to Galilee in the **power of the Spirit**, and news about him spread through the whole countryside" (4:14).

Although we may not understand how Jesus offered Himself "through the eternal Spirit" (*πνεύματος*, *pneumatos*), nevertheless, the author of Hebrews informs his readers that the Holy Spirit was involved in this sacrifice. Even with the believer, the Holy Spirit is associated with one's birth (John 3:5) and one's worship (4:23-24). Christians are not to give place to the devil (Ephesians 4:27) by participation in lying, anger, and so on. To give place to the devil is to "grieve the Holy Spirit." The Apostle Paul warns his readers:

And do not **grieve the Holy Spirit** of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Ephesians 4:30-32)

Again, Paul says, "Make every effort to keep the **unity of the Spirit** through the bond of peace" (4:3). Paul also makes the point that the Spirit is involved in our access to God: "For through him we both have access to the Father **by one Spirit**" (2:18). Earlier, in Paul's first letter to Corinth (AD 55), Paul draws attention to the Holy Spirit's operation of introduction into the body of Christ: "For we were all baptized **by one Spirit** into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the **one Spirit** to drink" (1 Corinthians 12:13). Paul's letter to Rome (AD 57) also calls attention to the role of the Holy Spirit in the lives of God's people:

Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. ¹³ For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but **if by the Spirit** you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, ¹⁴ because those who are **led by the Spirit** of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but **you received the Spirit** of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶ **The Spirit himself** testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. ¹⁷ Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Romans 8:12-17)

Before leaving this discussion of the Holy Spirit's role in the life of the believer, perhaps, another citation from Bultmann will help our understanding of this most important text (John 4:21-24):

Those who worship ἐν πνεύματι [*en pneumati*, “in Spirit”] are the ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος γεγεννημένοι [*ek tou pneumatos gegennēmenoi*, “of the Spirit having been born”] of 3:3-8. The ἀλήθεια [*alētheia*, truth] is the reality of God revealed in Jesus, the “Word” of God by which the believers are “sanctified”, i.e. are taken out of this worldly existence and set in the eschatological existence (17.17,19). Thus only the believers, those who are ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος γεγεννημένοι [*ek tou pneumatos gegennēmenoi*, of the Spirit having been born] and sanctified by the ἀλήθεια [*alētheia*, “truth”] are ἀληθινοὶ προσκυνῆται [*alēthinoi proskynētai*, “true worshippers”]. All other worship is untrue. God demands such worshippers; for worship of this kind is the only worship which accords with his nature; for he is pneu'ma [pneuma, Spirit].¹¹

Bultmann translates the Greek word λόγος (*logos*) with a capital “W,” signifying the eternal logos, not with a little “w,” indicating written revelation. Also, Bultmann’s comments on John 17:17 helps to reinforce the idea that “truth” in John 4:24 is none other than Jesus Himself. Generally, the phrase in John 17:17—“Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (ὁ λόγος ὁ σὸς ἀλήθεια ἐστίν, *ho logos ho sos alētheia estin*)—is associated, not with Jesus, but with the Bible as the “truth,” as is done in John 4:24; in other words, the interpretation is: “sanctify them through the Bible.” Today, for Christians to identify the word *truth* (ἀλήθεια, *alētheia*) as the Bible is the fashionable interpretation.

But is Jesus setting forth this concept that the Bible will sanctify? Again, a little repetition is in order. This belief that the Bible is under consideration is so well entrenched in the minds of God’s people that it is necessary to restate the contents in the previous paragraph in a little more systematic way. For instance, John reports the words of Jesus: —“Sanctify them by the truth (ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ, *en tē alētheia*); your word (λόγος, *logos*) is truth ἀλήθεια ἐστίν, *alētheia estin*.” Is Jesus asserting that He wants the Father to sanctify those that believe in Himself through the written revelation (the Bible) or is He saying that He wants the Father to set apart (sanctify) His believers through Him, the eternal Logos who became flesh? Consider the following words of John in his prologue to his Gospel:

In the beginning was the Word (λόγος, *logos*), and the Word (λόγος, *logos*) was with God, and the Word (λόγος, *logos*) was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ **In him was life**, and that life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. (John 1:1-5)

The Word (λόγος, *logos*) became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’” ¹⁶ From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; **grace and truth came through Jesus Christ**. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known. (1:14-18)

The first verse of this Gospel discloses the eternal existence and nature of the “Word,” or Logos. John informs his readers that the Logos was in the beginning and that the Logos was

¹¹Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* , 190.

God. Now, as we turn to John 17:19: “For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified,” we observe that the NIV translates the word *truth* as an adverb, but, on the other hand, the KJV translates this word *truth* as a noun: “And for their sakes I sanctify (ἀγιάζω, *hagiazō*) myself, that they also might be sanctified (ἡγιασμένοι *hēgiasme*¹²) through the truth (ἐν ἀλήθεια, *en alētheia*.)” When we are in Jesus we are sanctified because Jesus is sanctified. In fact, Paul states this very concept in his first letter to Corinth: “It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness [ἀγιασμός, *hagiasmos*, “sanctification”] and redemption.³¹ Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:30-31).

Again, as we reflect upon the word *truth* (ἀλήθεια, *alētheia*) in John 17:19, we cannot help but recall the words of Jesus to His disciples: “I am the way and the truth (ἡ ἀλήθεια, *hē alētheia*) and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Is not Jesus the One by whom men and women are set apart? Are not men and women sanctified through Jesus who is the Truth spoken of in His prayer to the Father? When we worship “in truth” (ἐν ἀληθεία, *en alētheia*), as stated in John 4:24, are we not we worshiping “in and through” Jesus? Other comments on sanctification are necessary because of the gravity of the subject. In order to clarify the phrase, “Sanctify them through thy truth,” as rendered in the KJV, it is necessary to look at the Book of Hebrews. It is my contention that the “truth” through which individuals are sanctified is none other than Jesus Himself. The Epistle to the Book of Hebrews contains one of the clearest references that we can read about in the New Testament with reference to sanctification:

For it became him, for whom *are* all things, and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. **11For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one:** for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, ¹²Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee. ¹³And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, **Behold I and the children which God hath given me,** (Hebrews 2:10-13, KJV)

The One who sanctifies is none other than Jesus (2:10). Also, the author of the Book of Hebrews further develops this doctrine of sanctification by saying, “And by that will, we have been made holy (ἡγιασμένοι, *hēgiasmenoi*, “to make holy, consecrate, sanctify”) **through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all**” (10:10). In other words, it is through the offering of Christ’s sinless body on the Cross that we are set apart (sanctified) for the work of God in the world. It is in this vein that the author of the Book of Hebrews pens: “Because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy [ἀγιαζομένους, *hagiazomenous*¹³] (10:14). Again, the author writes: “How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as

¹²From ἀγιάζω (*agiazō*, “to make holy, consecrate, sanctify”), verb: perfect, passive, participle, masculine, plural, nominative.

¹³From ἀγιάζω (*agiazō*, “to make holy, consecrate, sanctify”); verb: present, passive, participle, masculine, plural, accusative.

an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified (ἡγιασθη, *hēgiasthē*¹⁴) him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?” (10:29).

CONCLUSION

Just how should we interpret “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” in Jesus’ prayer to the Father in John 17:17? This chapter sets forth the concept that Jesus is the “truth” through whom everyone is sanctified. Again, the author of the Book of Hebrews reveals this perception: “And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy (ἡγιασθη, *hēgiasthē*, “to make holy, consecrate, to sanctify”) through his own blood” (Hebrews 13:12). Bultmann, too, captures this truth when he pens:

The statement here justifies the demand for a *προσκυνεῖν ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ* [*proskynein en pneumati kai alētheia*, to worship in Spirit and truth], inasmuch as it tells us that every cult undertaken by man (which is at best a searching for God) is illicit. **Adequate worship can only be given as an answer to God’s miraculous promulgation**, and as such is itself miraculous. There can be no true relationship between man and God unless it first be grounded in God’s dealing with man. **Any attempt by man to establish such a relationship remains within the sphere of human works from which God is unattainable**; for God is pneu'ma [pneuma], Spirit].¹⁵

We should reflect upon Paul’s reference to “worship by the Spirit of God” (Philippians 3:3) since Paul expresses similar worship terminology to the words of Jesus in John 4:24. Listen to Paul as he writes: “For it is we who are the circumcision, we who **worship by the Spirit of God**, who **glory in Christ Jesus**, and who put no confidence in the flesh” (3:3). *Moises Silva* (b. 1945), too, observes the similarity of language between Jesus and Paul. In the following commentary, he seeks to explain the phrase “by the Spirit of God”:

Paul identifies God’s people as those “who worship in [or by] the Spirit of God.” Whatever the differences between Pauline and Johannine theology, one can hardly deny that this phrase is conceptually equivalent to John 4:23-24 (true worshipers worship God “in the Spirit and in truth”). **In neither passage, however, is the point being made that true worship is inner rather than external** (So Hwth (Hawthorne). Et. Al.). The reference is surely to the eschatological significance of the Holy Spirit’s outpouring. **The coming of Christ**, in other words, **has ushered in the new age of salvation**, and **the Holy Spirit is the sign of this redemption**. Those who belong to Christ are part of the new order (2 Cor. 5:17); they have the Spirit and are thus able to offer Worship that is pleasing to God (Rom. 8:8-9; 12:1).¹⁶

¹⁴From ἡγιαζω (*agiazō*, “to make holy, consecrate, sanctify”), verb: third person, singular, aorist, passive, indicative.

¹⁵Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 191-192.

¹⁶Moises Silva, *Philippians*, The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1988), 170-171.