

# LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

HARRY BOWERS, EDITOR

7844 GRIMSBY CIRCLE, HARRISBURG, N.C. 28075

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## THE CHURCH: SHELTERS IN A VINEYARD AND WATCHMAN'S HUTS IN A CUCUMBER FIELD?

Isaiah opens his prophesy with a vivid description of the worship of the religious Jews in his day (Isa.1:2-15). They had multiplied sacrifices of burnt offerings of rams, cattle, lambs, and goats. They had appeared before Him in the temple courts bringing offerings and incense. They had observed new moons, sabbath days and solemn assemblies and had kept the new moon festivals and the appointed feasts. They spread their hands before Him in prayer and even multiplied their prayers before Him. All they practiced in their religion were precisely things God commanded in the Law of Moses and, yet this is what God said of their worship: "What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me? I have had enough of your worthless burnt offerings, incense is an abomination to Me. Bring your offerings no longer. I cannot endure your solemn assemblies. I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, they have become a burden to Me. I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you. Even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen."

God sums up their pitiful condition by saying: "The daughter of Zion is left like a *shelter in a vineyard and like watchman's hut in a cucumber field.*" No one would think of constructing a shelter over a vineyard to keep the sun from ripening the grapes, and who would place a watchman in a hut to guard a patch of cucumbers? This would be useless, yet it describes their worship. God calls both the heavens and earth to listen to His indictment. He condemns their multiplied sacrifices, burnt offerings of rams and blood of bulls, their appearing before him and trampling his courts, their worthless offerings and their keeping new moons and Sabbaths, and the calling of their solemn assemblies. They were so busy in the temple worship, or as we would say today "attending church," they forgot God.

God's remedy for all this was "wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from My sight, cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless; defend the orphan, and plead for the widow" (ver. 16, 17). God does not address them as His people, rather he says, "hear the word of the Lord you rulers of Sodom give ear to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah" (ver. 10). God has this to say about the sin of Sodom: "Behold, this was the guilt of Sodom; she had arrogance, abundant food, and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy. Thus, they were haughty and committed abominations before Me." (Ezek. 16:49, 50). It is very easy to be caught up in the externals of public worship and miss the real meaning of worship.

Jesus makes a terrible indictment of the religious leaders in his day by saying: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men, neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of man" (Mark 7: 8). Much that is called worship today is not worship because they who participate

feel good about it and think it is God-blessed does not make it so. One of the failures of worship today, especially the modern worship music, is a failure to worship God as He has revealed Himself in the story of redemption. Many worship God in the image of the familiar, the emotional the entertaining and often the trivial. God help us!

This brings us to the question "what is worship?." When we consult the Hebrew and Greek lexicons we are told the word translated "worship" in the Old Testament means "to depress, to prostrate (especially in homage to royalty or God); to bow oneself down, to fall down flat, to humbly beseech." In the New Testament, the Greek word means "to kiss, to fawn or to crouch, to prostrate oneself in homage." The word used in the New Testament for worship is "*proskynesis.*" It is very common in the gospels and Acts and again in Revelation, but an astonishing fact is that the word is completely absent in the Epistles, apart from two OT quotations in Hebrews 1:6, 11:21 and one verse in I Corinthians 14:25. This seems to say that the word for worship used in the OT, the Gospels and Revelation shows a bowing down in worship before a visible majesty. The Son of God was visible while on the earth (Gospels) and the exalted Lord is visible in Heaven (Revelation). The word used most for worship in the epistles is the word "*latreuo.*" Two illustrations of its use is Phil. 3:3: "for we are the circumcision who *worship* in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh", and Rom. 12:1: "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual *service,*" (some translations read "your spiritual service of worship," but the phrase "of worship" is not in the original text). The word "service" in this passage is the same word as "worship" in Phil. 3:3. Further, Hebrews 9:14 states: "the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, (will) cleanse your conscience from dead works to *serve (latreuo)* the living God." This passage tells us two things: worship can become "dead works" and only when our conscience is cleansed can we worship God acceptably. This means that true worship is not ritual performed on Sunday morning at 8:30 or 11:00 a.m. but rather worship is presenting one's body a living sacrifice to God in a daily walk with God.

In John 4:20-24 Jesus, instead of naming a place to which pilgrims should go to worship, says that the true place of worship is in the Spirit and in truth. Verse 24 states: "God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and in truth." Because God is spirit, He cannot be limited to one place, whether it be in Jerusalem or in Mt. Gerizim, the ornate building reflecting millions of dollars or the "church in someone's house." Because the Holy Spirit has come into the world, people may worship God anywhere if they are motivated by the Holy Spirit. Only those who are born of the Spirit can worship God in the way He desires to be worshipped.

So true worship is worship that is lived within the sphere of God's Holy Spirit and involves one's walking in the Spirit (worship in spirit) and adheres to the teachings of Jesus (worship in truth). This concept of worship is illustrated in Ephesians 5:15-20 where we are admonished to be careful how we walk, make the most of our time and understand what the will of the Lord is. Then we have the admonition: "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord." The parallel passage in Colossians 3:16-17 states that we are to teach and admonish one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Singing then as a part of our worship is not to create a special mood or right atmosphere, or to give us a good feeling. One of the purposes of singing is to teach and admonish one another. The important question in regard to worship is not whether it is contemporary or traditional, whether we use an organ or a guitar, songbooks or overhead projectors, shaped notes or no notes, but is it Biblical?! It is as important to sing scripturally as it is to preach scripturally. There is as much false teaching in our hymns as there is in the pulpit.

The late Carl Ketcherside comments on John 4:24 in these words from his article *The Reasonable Worship* in his paper *Mission Messenger*: "'Worship in spirit and reality' actually consists of the surrender of self to God. It is giving my eyes, ears, mouth, tongue, hands and feet to God and doing so as an act of commitment. It entails the devoting of my bodily desires, feelings, passions, and sensations to God, holding nothing back. Thus, everything I do in the body, with an eye singled to the glory of God, is worship. For the Christian there are no 'acts of worship' for the simple reason that there are no acts which are not worship." The early Christians did not "attend a worship service," Their whole life was a *living sacrifice* (Rom. 12:1) of worship. They did not "go to church" to worship, they were worshippers who went to church (assembled together: Heb. 10:25) for "the Apostles doctrine, fellowship, breaking the bread and prayers" (Acts 2:42). Worship is not a thing to be done but a life to be lived.

Another thought concerning Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 is that Paul is not referring to singing in a worship service, rather individually in our daily walk. This is not to say we are not to assemble together as a church. The New Testament has much to say about our meeting together. There are many examples that show a variety of reasons why the church assembled together: They were to assemble together for the encouragement of one another (Heb. 10:25). In Acts 12:12 the church met together in the home of Mary for Prayers on behalf of Peter who was in prison. The church in Acts 15 came together to settle a doctrinal problem concerning Gentile Christians. The gathering in Acts 20:7 was to eat together, have the Lord's supper, and since Paul was present, he talked with them a long time and then left (ver. 11). In I Corinthians 5:1-5 they came together to deal with a moral problem in the church. In I Corinthians 11 they assembled for a meal, which included the Lord's Supper. It is important that we "forsake not the assembling of ourselves together," but this in no way constitutes all our worship of God. None of these passages teach that their purpose is to hold a worship service though we do worship God when we come together. Yet our service of worship does not end at the close of a meeting, rather it only begins there. There is still much confusion about worship. As Curtis Dickinson wrote in *The Witness*: "In studying this

subject I was surprised to learn that not once in the N.T. does it say that God's people ever came together to worship. The assembly was never called a 'worship service' and people are never spoken of as 'worshipping.' This is not to say that they did not worship as they assembled. My guess is that they did, but you won't find it in scripture. Nor did they have 'houses of worship' in the modern sense. They met in homes, or public places, and we have no clue as to an 'order of service' in their meetings. Our worship services are derived from five sources: Old Testament temple worship; Roman Catholicism, passed through the Reformation; pagan practices which were never fully abandoned by converts; some New Testament practices, and the format for many of today's worship services seem to be copied from the theater (T.V. and movies etc.). Some go to church to escape from reality they find in exciting programs."

Colossians 2:23: After warning the Colossians to avoid mysticism and asceticism Paul says "These are matters which have the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion." The King James Version translates "self-made religion" as "will worship." Self-made worship has nothing to do with what God requires, rather it is worship devised by man and can be described as one's delight in his own righteousness or self-imposed worship. This worship can be illustrated by two examples from the Old Testament:

First, the worship at the "high places" and second, the offering of the Passover lamb. During the patriarchal times any man could sacrifice to God on an altar they built. (Some examples: Noah, Gen. 8:20; Abraham, Gen. 12:7; 13:18; Jacob, Gen 33:20; and Moses, Ex. 17:15, 24:4). When the tabernacle was built only the priest were allowed to offer sacrifices and they had to be offered in the tabernacle, and later the temple. Numbers 16-17 records the fact of a rebellion in the wilderness against Moses and Aaron by Korah, Dathan and Abiram, who said "All the congregation are, holy, every one of them..." (16:3). They were saying the people had a right to sacrifice as well as the priests. God brought judgment upon them and established the priests as the only acceptable ones to offer sacrifices. The old system of anyone building an altar and offering a sacrifice was over. All sacrifices had to be offered by the priest in the tabernacle. However, from the time they entered Canaan until the exile under Nebuchadnezzar, there were many that insisted on "worshipping God" on the "high places" they built. This led to the idolatry of their worshipping the false gods of the pagans on the high places. (An example of the "high places" is seen in Jeremiah 7:31; 17:3; 19:5; 32:35). Ezekiel 6 describes God's judgment against their high places. These high places were "self-made worship" or "worship devised by men," much like worship today that has no basis in the Scripture. In the second place, self-made worship is illustrated in the fact that in celebration of the Passover there was to be only one lamb offered. "Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year; ye shall take it from the sheep or from the goats" (Ex. 12:5). Only one animal was to be offered. If anyone thought that if one offering did a good job, then two offerings would do more, it would become a personal sacrifice beyond what God required and would be a declaration that man was able to pay God out of their own assets. We are not to try to placate God by our own acts He does not require. When the Passover lamb was offered there was no more that could be done to enhance the sacrifice. When Jesus said God must be "worshipped in Spirit and truth" anything we add is erecting a "shelter in a vineyard and watchman's hut in a cucumber patch."