

# LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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## GOD'S AUTHORIZED WORSHIP

In his encounter with the Samaritan woman Jesus told her "You worship that which you do not know" (John 4:22). Some of the history of Samaria shows why Jesus made that statement. II Kings 17:24-41 tells the story. When Assyria took Israel into captivity, the king of Assyria brought men from different nations to live in Samaria "in place of the sons of Israel" (ver.24). They brought with them the worship of their own gods and God punished them for this. "Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, 'Take one of the priest whom you carried away into exile, and let him go there and teach them the custom of the god of the land.' So one of the priest came and lived at Bethel and taught them how they should fear the Lord" (vers. 27-28). The people "feared the Lord and served their own gods...they also served their idols; their children likewise and their grandchildren, as their father did, so they do to this day" (vers. 33, 41). From this we can see why the Samaritans worshipped "that which they did not know." The danger of the church today is they believe and fear the Lord but may worship that which they do not know.

There is an erroneous idea today that the main reason we attend worship services is to "get something out of the service" rather than going to give our worship to God. This is the reason people cannot be satisfied with the worship when their emphasis is not on the proper object of worship: God. What the Scriptures have to say about worship is for many people of little consequence as long as they are happy and feel good. Our concern should be with what God says on how He is to be worshipped instead of what we might want to offer Him. There is no command or example in the New Testament that refers to a "corporate worship service". The only two references in the New Testament that describe worship are directed to individuals. 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 (Heb. 10:25; Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11; I Cor. 11:17-34; 14:23, 24; I Cor. 5:4) and it is important that we "forsake not the assembling of ourselves together" but this in no way constitutes 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 worship does not end at the close of the meeting, rather it begins there. The words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman shows that worship would not be in specific places. God does not dwell in temples built by hands (Acts 17:24). True worship is not in locations, but Spirit and truth. 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 teaching of Jesus (worship in truth).

British author Harry Blamires in his classic book, *The Post Christian Mind* states that "the concept of 'duty' has all but disappeared from modern thinking." He then makes the following statement: "I once saw in a newspaper two photographs of people worshipping. The one showed a handful of people kneeling in a village church. The other showed a packed mosque with rows and rows of the human hindquarters of bowing worshipers of every age. These two photos come to my mind whenever I hear a minister introducing some vulgarization

of worship on the grounds that it will 'attract the young'. What attracts those packed rows of worshipping Muslims? Their behavior testifies to a strong sense of duty. The last thing it suggests is that the worshipers are thoroughly 'enjoying' themselves. Indeed emphasis on worship as a duty to God ought to be the priority for all of us. It should supercede any specious notions of 'attracting' men and women to a place of worship as though it were a place of entertainment." During the last decade of the twentieth century the subject of worship became a hot topic in churches. The actuality and the extent of the problem was pointed out in an article in *Worship Leader*, an update slick paged magazine evidently sent free to ministers, which carried an article by Robert Redman Jr. of Fuller Theological Seminary entitled: *Friendly Fire, Evangelical Critics Take Aim At Contemporary Worship*. The article was actually a critique of two books: *Room For God* by Robert Wenz and *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down* by Marva Dawn, which were evidently critical of contemporary worship. Redman accuses them of "singling out our culture for thorough and total condemnation" and he asks "Why is our culture so fundamentally different from any other?" (If he can't see this then he's been in the seminary classroom to long). His point, I think, was to "move churches beyond worship wars to a genuine worship awaking." This is a noble goal. Very little has ever been accomplished by holy wars.

The war was being waged on the ground of worship because it has, for some reason, become the means of attracting young people to the church. Songs and music chiefly characterizes the contemporary worship movement, but is also a principle part of traditional churches. However singing and praise does not constitute "worship". It is definitely a part of worship, but praise is not worship. We have established "praise teams" and "worship leaders" that are primarily concerned with and deals with music and singing. Music, singing and praise is not all there is to the worship of the church, but basically the music and songs sets the character of worship. The fact that modern youth get wildly excited in the world of discos and rock groups has not been overlooked by the modern preacher who thinks he is going to reach those who are the sons and daughters of the flower children, the hippies and the drop outs of the 60's he must be "relevant". The way to do this, he is told in the church growth seminars, and by professors training youth ministers, is to substitute pop music and guitars and drums for traditional hymns pianos, and organs. So the battled rages between "contemporary" and "traditional" worship. Worship, sadly, then becomes not a duty, but a time of entertainment. We are a generation that would much rather be entertained than enlightened. So the modern church has to give modern worshipers the same things they are accustomed to in the world. Should not the church offer something that can be found no other place in the world?

But let's not be too hard on the advocates of contemporary worship. We need to look at the tendency of the traditionalists to abuse worship. A popular religious denomination claims to have the only true grasp on worship and has worship all wrapped up in one verse: Acts 2:42, which they call "The Worship" and claim if

the four elements mentioned there are not being done it is not worship. These four elements, the Lord's supper, public prayers, fellowship (congregational singing, giving into the church coffers), and preaching (the Apostles doctrine). The irony of this is that the word "worship" does not occur in this text. Some of the music and songs in the traditional services rival the pop and disco of the contemporary. One of the commands in Scripture is to "teach and admonish one another" with our singing (Col. 3:16). This goes further than just being entertained. Yet there is more bad theology and false doctrine taught in our songs than by any other means. It may be entertaining and enjoyable to sing of "blessed trinities and fluttering angel's wings, the land of corn and wine and camping in Canaan, of gardens and bells, the church in the valley, and the church in the wildwood, little fires burning and prayer wheels turning, and how great it is going to be when we die and fly away or raptured and get our mansion over there or a cabin in the corner of glory land", but none of this could be seen as worshipping the holy God of the universe, and if this is what we are teaching in our songs, hymns and spiritual songs we are missing the point of worship. The book of Hebrews suggest that praise and good works, not good feelings, should be the natural fruit of worship: "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that confess His name, And do not forget to do good works and share with others, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Heb. 13:15, 16).

Another worship war, much more subtle, not as prominent as the contemporary/traditional wars, has been waged through the years chiefly by the Fundamentalist and Evangelicals. That is the question of non-liturgical and liturgical worship. I mention this to point out the inconsistency of much of our worship today. Liturgical churches often have a fixed order to their worship with fixed prayers, multiple Scripture readings, and extensive symbolism (altar, cross, candles, incense). They also tend to have Communion each Sunday (using wine) and adhere to the liturgical calendar year. Non-liturgical churches may have a less formal pattern of worship characterized by more spontaneity or greater simplicity. Some fundamentalist worship services are characterized by very little Scripture being read in the service. Sometimes preachers would wave the Bible around, slam it on the pulpit, talk about what it said and quote isolated verses, and many times in the sermon talk about what "God laid on his heart" that week. Evangelicalism has become a cult of celebrities. Leading pastors are superstars, even attaining a near-worship status. Most evangelical worship encourages this imitation of the entertainer. Musicians, preachers, worship leaders all take their cues in style, dress and manner from the entertainment idolatry of our culture. Liturgical worship does not encourage this.

Usually the word "liturgy" refers to the order of worship in a worship service. If this is what is meant then every Fundamentalist and Evangelical church has a liturgy. It goes something like this: the pianist does a prelude, the "worship leader" comes forward and leads the congregation in songs, many times backed up by loud instruments, then the preacher leads the congregation in prayer. In churches that have the Lord's Supper every Sunday, the elements of bread and juice are passed, then the collection (received by singing a hymn), then the sermon, and last of all the dismissal prayer. Very little Scripture is read in the service and basically the same prayers are said each week by the same people. This is close to the same pattern that has been used

for over 150 years and if something different is done the congregation probably gets nervous really fast. Even in the contemporary "praise and worship" services, rote and ritual is the norm. Usually the same "contemporary" songs are sung over and over again. Every week the service follows the same structure: praise singing and a sermon. The same people who clapped to the songs one week usually will the next and those who stood still usually do so the next Sunday. This is true although the claim that ritual and rote are signs of a liturgical church described by some non-liturgical churches as dead, phony, frozen, formal and boring, repeating "written prayers" and creeds. Fundamentalist and Evangelical churches have an aversion to written prayers, but if they are written in a song book and set to music they are acceptable. They are quick to condemn the liturgical churches for reciting the creeds, yet they believe and defend vigorously some of the main doctrines of the creeds, such as the doctrine of the Holy Trinity from the Nicene creed. Liturgical churches have been frowned upon for following the church year calendar. However Fundamentalist and Evangelical churches grab two of the most important dates on the calendar and celebrate them with gusto, that is: Christmas and Easter. How many of these non-liturgical churches ever hear a sermon on the ascension of Christ while they condemn the liturgical churches for celebrating ascension day. The problem with much of our criticisms and reactions to what we do not agree with is that we are prone to condemn others while neglecting our own abuses and our reaction many times creates another abuse worse than the one we disagree with. For example the Puritans of the sixteenth and seventeenth century England, reacting against the excesses of Roman Catholicism, banned from worship all uses of musical instruments and even all hymns. This shows the inconsistency in our worship today. Many churches today "know not what they worship".

This brings us to the question "what is worship?" 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 are Philippians 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 Romans 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 Philippians 3:3. This means that true worship is not a 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 twenty-four hours a day. If God expects us to corporately perform acts of worship then we had better get busy and find out what they are and how to perform them, but the truth of the matter is that there is nothing in the New Testament by example, command or otherwise that refers to a "corporate worship service".

