

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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WORSHIP SERVICE OR SERVICE OF WORSHIP

In the last issue of *Living Waters Newsletter* I ended an article with these words “It is time the church rid itself of the silly ‘worship wars’ it is currently engaged in and begin to expound the truths of God’s word...” One of the truths of God’s word which needs to be expounded and clarified today is the subject of worship. There is a lot of talk today about “worship renewal”, but a lot of confusion about just what it is that needs to be renewed. Jack Reese, dean of the College of Biblical Studies at Abilene Christian University stated it in these words: “My problem is not that people desire worship renewal. Rather it is the assumption, among many, that such renewal is primarily about music. If only our songs were more celebratory, if only we chose more relevant songs, sang more enthusiastically, had better worship leaders, recruited better musicians, or wrote greater hymns, then surely our worship would be better” (*Christian Standard*, May 7, 2006). The problem he is addressing is relative to what is happening in churches on Sunday mornings. Our problem is not to try to change what we are doing but to understand what we should be doing.

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. 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, twenty-four hours a day. 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. 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 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.

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 (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 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.

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 men”. (Mark 7:7,8 quoting from Isa. 29:13). If anyone knew about vain and useless worship it was Isaiah. He opens his prophecy with a vivid description of the useless and empty worship of the religious Jews, which, he says, God hates. Much that is called worship today is not worship and just because participants feel good about it and think it is God-blessed does not make it so. The great failure of worship today, especially 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!

GOD'S REPRESENTATIVES ON THE EARTH

A common thought among Christians is the idea that God's purpose is to get as many people out the world as He possibly can and then the earth is going to be destroyed. To many the destruction of the earth is a Scriptural principle based upon II Peter 3:10,11: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness." The word "destroyed" in these verses is the same word used in verse 6 where he states "the world at that time (Noah's time) was destroyed being flooded with water" When God "destroyed" the world in Noah's day He did not annihilate it, neither will the present earth be annihilated but rather will be redeemed: "the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility ...because of Him who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8:19-21). The earth as a part of God's creation is to be redeemed, not destroyed.

From the beginning God has purposed to have man represent Him on the earth and to rule over His creation (Gen. 1: 26-28). For this reason he was created in the image of God. But when sin came into the world that image was marred and God put into motion a plan which would in Christ restore His image (Rom. 8:29; Col. 3:10). In spite of the loss of His image in the earth until Christ would come and restore His image, God's purpose was to have a representative upon the earth. As long as there were a people on the earth representing Him, He was referred to as "the God of heaven and earth". For this reason, when God made covenant with Abraham, He would establish a people in the land who would be His representatives. The land of promise then became the place where the image of God would be displayed in a people who were His representatives. As long as He had a representative in the land He is called the "God of heaven and earth", but if He had no representative in the land He was called only "the God of heaven". When Abraham is speaking of the time when he was in Ur of the Chaldeans, before he entered the land, he spoke of God as "the God of heaven" (Gen. 24:7), but when he is established in the land he speaks of God as "the God of heaven and the God of earth" (Gen. 24:3). When Israel was in captivity in Egypt God had no representative in the land. During this time He was referred to as "The God of heaven" (Psalm 136:23-26). At no time in this captivity is He referred to as "the God of heaven and earth" but the moment they enter the land after the captivity He is referred to as "God of heaven above and on earth beneath" (Josh. 1:11). When Israel was taken captive and was in Babylon for seventy years God is always referred to as "the God of heaven", never as "the God of heaven

and earth". (Ezra 1:2, 7:21,23; Neh. 1:4, 2:4) The book of Daniel always refers to Him as "the God of heaven" (*too many references to list them all*), but the moment they return to the land He is referred to as "the God of heaven and earth" (Ezra 5:11). In the Gospels when Jesus is God's representative, He is referred to as "the Lord of heaven and earth" (Luke 10:21; Matt. 11:25). In Acts, having a representative as the church, He is called "the Lord of heaven and earth" (Acts 17:24).

God has great plans for the earth and these plans involve His people. In Israel's darkest hour He said: "as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord" (Num. 14:21). Again He says: "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Hab. 2:14), and "the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:9). The only way the earth will be filled with the knowledge and glory of the Lord is through His people. This was God's plan in the beginning. Not only was man to subdue the earth and rule over it, but he was to bear the image of God in the earth (Gen. 1:16-18). This task, God's eternal purpose, having been lost by Adam, is restored by Christ and His people. (see Hebrews 2:5-10). Now, just as Israel was His chosen vessel in the Old Testament, His people, the church, is to carry out this eternal purpose. Paul had become an ambassador of "the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things, in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This is in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:9-11). He further stated it in these words: "Therefore we are ambassadors (representatives) for Christ, as though God were entreating through us, we beg you on behalf of Christ (in His stead) be reconciled to God" (II Cor. 5:20). God's purpose is not to get us out of the world (the so called "rapture") but into the world as representatives of the God of heaven and of earth.

When Jesus was upon the earth it is said that He is "the radiance of His (God's) glory and the exact representation of His nature" (Heb. 1:3), "he is the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15) and he "is the image of God" (II Cor. 4:4). No wonder Jesus could say "he that has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn. 14:9). It is stated in II Corinthians 3:18 that we as we behold the glory of the Lord "are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory" and Colossians 3:10 says we are "being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created us". This means the image of God has been restored in the world and God is being represented by His people, the church. Thus the church is to be a reflection of Jesus Christ just as He was a reflection of God, His Father. This is what the church being the body of Christ is all about. What Jesus was in His physical body, He is the same in His spiritual body. So the church should be able to say "He that sees us, sees God".

