
DISCERNMENT NEWSLETTER

“...how is it that ye do not discern this time?” Luke 12:56

Volume 21, Number 1

Jan/Feb 2010

EMERGENT WORSHIP— WONDER OR WASTELAND?

All's not Well with Smells and Bells

By Pastor Larry DeBruyn who has authored a new book titled,
Unshackled: Breaking Away From Seductive Spirituality.

God is spirit, and those who worship
Him must worship in spirit and truth.

• Jesus, John 4:24, NASB

On Sunday evenings, *St. John's Episcopal Cathedral* in Denver, Colorado, morphs to become a parallel congregation called *The Wilderness*. “It’s really different,” remarked one attendee. “It’s really contemporary, yet calm and collected. I love the music. I feel God here *more than any other place.*”¹

But just what is it that makes this individual feel God’s presence in that particular place and setting? Seemingly, the feelings have to do with the cathedral and its high-vaulted-ceilings in which *The Wilderness* creates an ambiance that *shimmers* with the effects of purple and green lights (“like an indoor aurora borealis”), that *flickers* with dozens of candles burning next to icons situated in the dark nave, and that *smells* with the fragrance of incense permeating the air. As the reporter describes worship which occurs in *The Wilderness*:

Congregants can choose to sit in a pew or on thick cushions at the foot of a simple altar. A stringed Moroccan oud gives even traditional songs of praise an exotic twist, but there is also world music, chant and jazz.²

“We’re using the cathedral in new ways, making it more inviting and even sensual,” said the Rev. Peter Eaton. “It’s meant to celebrate and bring alive all the human senses. We’re trying to explore new ways of worshiping,” he added.³

Eaton hopes *The Wilderness* will attract uninspired Protestants, disaffected Catholics and other spiritual seekers who want a more mystical and meditative feeling than can be found in traditional Protestant services or at big-box churches.⁴ “We have what everybody else is wanting,” Eaton says. Then he adds:

We have the theological depth and breadth of a 2,000-year-old spiritual tradition. . . . Yet we also have exploration of new language and religious experience. . . . We’re trying to explore new ways of worshiping.⁵

Amongst liberal and emergent-evangelical Christians, there exists a consuming desire to experience God in “new ways.” To that end, varieties of mechanisms—sights, lights, smells and bells—are employed. By using such mechanisms to introduce new spiritual consciousnesses, Christians believe themselves to be experiencing God in novel and exciting ways. But in one simple statement, Jesus stated that the Father seeks a *different* kind of worship.

To a Samaritan woman, He said:

[T]rue worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. (John 4:23-24, NASB)

Twice the Lord explained that *true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth . . . in spirit and truth.* To understand such worship, and to evaluate how far Roman Catholics, Protestant liberals and emergent evangelicals appear to have departed and are straying from such worship, we should notice the details and implications of Jesus’ statement to the Samaritan woman. There is no more essential explanation for worship than can be found in the words of Jesus in their context.

First, the word *proskuneō* (i.e., “worship”) “is the most frequent word rendered to worship,” and means “to make obeisance, do reverence to (from *pros*, towards, and *kuneō*, to kiss). It is used of an act of homage or reverence . . . to God.”⁶ Genuine worship is not the frivolous activity many contemporary Christians think it is. As they, on Saturday evenings or Sunday mornings, try to fit a “god-thing” into their busy social and recreational schedules, people dress down, saunter into a church service, plop down in comfortable theater seating, and while sipping a cup of designer coffee obtained at a *Starbucks*-like venue in the foyer, watch a rock-n-roll worship team perform and listen to a mild mannered schmoozer tell them to be more mild. Then they exit feeling good about themselves and God, for God, after all, must love them.⁷ So we ask: Do such “worship” experiences have even a remote connection to the meaning for the biblical word for “worship”?

Throughout the Scriptures, worship involves homage paid by an inferior to a superior person. Worship was not a casual affair of the heart. Likewise, when people of faith approach God, they ought to possess a sense of holy reverence for Him. By faith they are coming before an awesome ruler who possesses the power of life and death over them (Exodus 12:27). Worship is no trivial thing. As the Seer of *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* describes heaven’s worship:

The four and twenty elders fall down before Him that sat on the throne, and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. (Emphasis mine, Revelation 4:10-11, KJV)

One of the physical manifestations of genuine worship is that of reverently bowing one's head or falling down on one's face before the Lord (See Genesis 24:26; Exodus 4:31; 12:27; 1 Chronicles 29:20; Nehemiah 8:6; 1 Corinthians 14:25; Revelation 5:14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:10; and 22:8-9.) Of A.W. Tozer's prayer life, James Snyder remarks that in the privacy of his study Tozer characteristically sprawled down on his face before God.⁸ We must admit that when contrasted with most Protestant services, traditional or contemporary, our worship falls far short of how Scripture pictures it to be. Worship should be about Him, not us. Like the heavenly multitude, we ought to offer ourselves in humble posture before the Lord and cry out, *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*

Second, Jesus mentions worshippers who are "true," the inference being that there are worshippers who are "false." Worship can be "Wow!"—a man-centered show that pretenses itself to be about God but is really all about "self." Recently I heard of a church that has changed the billboard advertisement for its second service from "Contemporary" to "Multi-Sensory Worship Experience." It's as if the purpose of worship is to provide us with experiences.

The possibility of worship becoming a man-centered "experience" ought to concern any true believer. Regardless of how it might be perceived on earth, worship can be phony in "the eyes" of the One before whom "**all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account**" (Hebrews 4:13, NKJV). Scripture is replete with examples of "Wow!" worship designed to make people feel good, to engender experiences (See Genesis 4:3-7; Exodus 32:1-10; Isaiah 1:10-15; Jeremiah 6:20; 14:12; Amos 5:21-23; Malachi 1:10.). In these examples, the dominant characteristic of false worship is the presumption with which worshippers offered their "sacrifices." They presumed God to have delighted in their offerings when He did not. Such worship might be called "works worship"—because they offer it to God, people imagine God accepts it. This brings us to a *third* observation.

God is spirit.⁹ In the essence of His being, God is non-material and non-corporeal, and analogically, seeks persons to by faith worship Him by in spirit and truth, in a non-material and non-corporeal manner.¹⁰ This is why to Israel the Lord gave the Second Commandment: "**You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water**

under the earth" (Exodus 20:4, NASB). Because He is Spirit, the Father desires to be worshipped in non-physical ways. John Calvin comments: "Christ simply declares here that his Father is of a spiritual nature, and, therefore, is not moved by frivolous matters, as men, through the lightness and unsteadiness of their character, are wont to be."¹¹ True worship therefore avoids manipulative mechanisms—physical sensations of lights and sights and smells and bells, all of which and more, are intended to make worship sensual and visible when it ought to be spiritual and invisible. The experiential stimulations derived from such phenomena masquerade themselves to be manifestations of God's presence. But like God, faith is invisible—"the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1, NASB). As Morris reminds us, "We must not think of God as material, or bound in any way to places or things."¹² Even though adorned with beautiful paintings and statues, beautiful places do not become sacred spaces. We cannot presume that God, who is spirit, is in any way bound to smells, bells, sights and lights. Yet there are those who find example for practicing such worship from the way that the Lord demanded He be worshipped during the Old Testament era. My response to those who derive their precedent for modern worship from the Old Testament practice of it is twofold.

ONE - *Worship Ceremony*

In the Ceremonial Law, God designed *how* the Israelites were to worship Him (Leviticus 27:34). The Lord stipulated rules of worship because from among all the ancient nations, He uniquely set Israel apart as a "**kingdom of priests and a holy nation**" (Exodus 19:6). Because they were holy unto the Lord, they were not to borrow worship practices from the surrounding pagans (Contra Numbers 25:1-9).¹³ As such, the surrounding nations would be impressed to think about Israel:

Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the Lord our God whenever we call on Him? Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today? (Deuteronomy 4:6b-8, NASB)

To preserve Israel's unique priestly witness and status among the ancient nations, adherence to God's Ceremonial Laws of worship became a serious matter. Departure from the rules of observance might result in physical death.

Nadab and Abihu

Because the sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu "**offered strange fire unto the Lord, which He had not commanded them . . . fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD**" (Leviticus 10:1-2, NASB). Explaining why his two sons were executed, Moses told Aaron: "**It is what the Lord spoke, saying, 'By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be**

honored” (Leviticus 10:3). But what was this **“strange fire”** they offered before the Lord?

These worship leaders ignored God’s Ceremonial Law and took the manner of worship into their own hands. Perhaps they improperly mixed incense with the offering to become a **“sweet savor”** unto the Lord (Exodus 30:34-34). Perhaps they took ceremonial fire from a place other than the high altar which the Lord supernaturally lighted and commanded that they take the fire from (Leviticus 16:12-13).¹⁴ Maybe they had even lighted the fire themselves, or borrowed the ceremonial fire from one of the “high places” of Canaanite worship.¹⁵ No matter. For deviating from the Lord’s Ceremonial Law, they died.

Uzza

Amidst the festivities of celebrating the return of the Ark from the Philistines, the Ark threatened to topple from the cart upon which it was being transported back to Jerusalem. Spontaneously, Uzza **“put out his hand to the ark”** to steady it, whereupon for touching the Ark, God smote him. Uzza **“died there before God”** (1 Chronicles 13:1-13). Why did the Lord resort to such drastic action against Uzza? Evidently the Ark was not being moved **“according to the ordinance”** of the Lord (1 Chronicles 15:13). In other words, the Israelites did not treat the Ark of the divine presence as holy and transported it in an unlawful manner. Perhaps they borrowed the manner of transporting the Ark from how they observed the pagan Philistines transporting it while they possessed it (1 Samuel 7:1-2). Nevertheless, the celebrating entourage that transported the Ark back to Jerusalem failed to treat the symbol of God’s presence as holy. In the midst of the celebration, Uzza illegally touched the Ark, and for doing so, God took Uzza’s life.

Applications

There are lessons to be gained from these two incidents. *First*, in worshipping God, people must be careful about adopting styles of worship from the surrounding culture.¹⁶ Adopting worldly methods of worship into the church can affect the message of the church.¹⁷ Worship can become entertainment (a multi-sensory worship experience). Therefore, consistent with the Lord’s command, Israel was to separate her worship practices from those of *the surrounding Canaanites*. In like manner, the New Testament calls Christians to separate themselves from the manners and mores of *the surrounding culture*, even at the risk of being pejoratively labeled pious and prudish (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

Second, no one should presume that **“the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man”** (Acts 17:29). Christian worshippers should consider that, all ceremonial hoopla and sensory perceptions notwithstanding, profane worship styles borrowed from the culture below can anesthetize and inoculate people against genuine spiritual life and experience that comes from the true and living God above (John 3:8; 1

Corinthians 12:11). John Calvin wrote that, “all who oppress the Church with an excessive multitude of ceremonies, do what is in their power to deprive the Church of the presence of Christ.”¹⁸ If, in the name of relevance, **“strange fire”** is offered to God, such worship will facilitate spiritual death, not life. There’s grave spiritual danger when churches allow the culture, whether medieval or modern, to affect their worship style, because style influences substance.¹⁹ The Lord did not allow Israel to worship Him *however they desired* because worship was to be about Him, not them.

TWO - Worship Change

Jesus told the Samaritan: **“Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father”** (John 4:21, NASB). Jesus predicted that one day worship would no longer be associated with beautiful places and sacred spaces like the competing Mounts of Gerizim (Samaria) and Zion (Judah).²⁰ To the woman of Samaria, Jesus predicted the coming obsolescence of the forms of worship practiced at both locations. Faithful worship in all places would be entirely compatible with the omnipresent God who, in the essence of His being, is spirit. If Jesus predicted the end of worship in those “sacred” places *then*, one of which the Lord Himself chose (Deuteronomy 12:5, 11, 13-14; 2 Chronicles 7:12; Psalm 78:68-69), then surely we can assume there are no sacred places *now*. Jesus told the woman that true worship would transcend association with location. As Morris commented, “Man cannot dictate the ‘how’ or the ‘where’ of worship.”²¹ When Jesus paid the final sacrifice Matthew records: **“And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom”** (Matthew 27:51). The rending of the veil signaled the end of Levitical worship. So why try to model contemporary worship after a form of worship Jesus predicted would end and, upon His death (A.D. 33) and the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70), did?

Return to the forms and rituals portrayed in the Old Testament challenges the sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice (See John 2:19-22.). The sacrificial death of Christ cannot be supplemented, and the resurrection life He imparts cannot be imitated. So Paul warned the Colossians: **“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ”** (Colossians 2:16-17, KJV). As Westcott wrote of Jesus’ statement to the Samaritan woman: “The sphere of worship was therefore now to be that highest region where the divine and human meet, and not, as in an earlier period of discipline, material or fleshly.”²² As evidenced by the fact that we no longer bring animal sacrifices to church, Jesus changed the divine prescription for worship!

It should be noted that the Father seeks to be worshipped **“in spirit and truth.”** One preposition (*in*) governs two coordinate nouns, “spirit and truth” (*en pneumati kai aletheia*). Worship is not bipolar, one pole being emotional and the other intellectual. No. The Father

seeks persons to worship Him in the sphere of *both* spirit and truth.²³ “The words” as Westcott states, “describe the characteristics of worship in one complex phrase . . . and not in two coordinate phrases.”²⁴ In other words, spirit and truth are worship’s paternal twins. Unless worship includes both spirit *and* truth, it does not qualify as the kind of worship the Father seeks. Worshipers are not to emphasize the spiritual at the expense of the doctrinal, or vice versa. Worshipping only in the spirit—which many contemporaries interpret to mean in and with their “feelings”—is not genuine worship. Neither is worshipping only in truth—which many understand to mean doctrine or teaching. Legitimate worship necessitates the balanced presence of both. But how are we to understand *spirit-truth* worship?

Worshipping in Spirit

The Bible distinguishes two classes of people in the world, both classes of which include persons from every race, gender, nationality, age and so forth. At one level, and one level only, does the Bible discriminate between persons, and that is this: There are those who are spiritual and those who are not. Jesus said: **“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again’”** (John 3:6-7, NASB). The Apostle Paul wrote to the Roman believers: **“But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his”** (Romans 8:9, KJV).

It may surprise some to know that only those who are alive in “spirit” possess the capacity to worship the God who is spirit.²⁵ The Spirit of Christ is the connection between the separate worlds of heaven above and earth below. It stands axiomatic then that spiritual worship demands spiritual worshippers. Thus, unbelievers find themselves at an impasse to worship the Father because, for lack of faith in the Son, they are not the Father’s spiritual children. As those born only from below, and because their spirits are therefore dead, they do not submit to God’s kingdom rule in their lives. Unregenerate persons do not view God as their superior and therefore cannot worship Him as their superior.

This *sine qua non* of worship ought to trouble contemporary congregations that script their services—they call them “celebrations”—to be as palatable to unbelievers as believers, to outsiders as well as insiders, to “non-born-agains” as well as “born-agains.” How can Christ-deniers justifiably claim to be worshipping God the Father? Do not those who deny the Son deny the Father also (1 John 2:22-23)? If the sovereign Spirit has not endowed persons with the capacity to worship God, then it should not be presumed they possess the ability to do so. As together they gin up the excitements of the worship experience, can it be assumed that a mixed multitude is worshipping simply because they, with lifted hands, find themselves swaying and singing in close proximity to one another?

Mark this well: Between regenerate and unregenerate persons, the only common denominator for so-called worship is “the flesh,” and regarding the flesh, the Apostle states:

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Romans 8:5-8, NASB).

Calvin observed:

Since men are flesh, we ought not to wonder, if they take delight in those things which correspond to their own disposition. Hence it arises, that they contrive many things in the worship of God which are full of display, but have no solidity.²⁶

We must ask ourselves: Do the “worship wars” that have divided and are dividing local churches arise from the flesh or the Spirit? How much of worship today—whether traditional or contemporary—is sourced in what people want, and not in what God desires?

To answer this question, we must remember that the goal of the Holy Spirit is to promote unity, and that divisions in churches result when members follow their fleshly instincts and dictates (Compare John 17:22-23; 1 Corinthians 12:13; 11:18). In worship, churches ought to find unity in the Spirit as together they worship God. Yet such unity ought to be sourced in the common beliefs of Holy Scripture, which brings us to the second paternal twin of worship—truth.

Worshipping in Truth

Of the coming of the Spirit, Jesus told His disciples, **“And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth [who] . . . will be in you”** (John 14:16-17, NASB). Because the Holy Spirit is **“the Spirit of truth,”** the Father seeks to be worshipped in truth.

True worship centers upon the Savior and the Scriptures. Jesus told the disciples: **“When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me”** (John 15:26, NASB). The center of attraction of true worship is the Lord Jesus Christ.²⁷ In the gathering of the church, He ought to occupy center stage. Because He is the focus of worship in heaven, He—not soloists, instrumentalists, or a worship team of singers, guitarists, and drummers—ought to be the focus of worship on earth.²⁸ And herein lays a great question for congregants who applaud musical performances in church: When offered, is the applause for the artist or for Christ? If the

focus is upon the artist, then it cannot be said that the attention of worship is upon God. In biblical worship, the spotlight ought to shine upon the Lord Jesus Christ. That is as the Spirit would have it. But sadly, in the worship of most churches now-a-days, other attractions are offered. Worship's all about them, not Him. And traditional forms of worship can be as guilty of misplacing the affections of worshipers as contemporary. If there is applause, then it ought to be directed to Him. He is the one who said, "**I am . . . the truth**" (John 14:6).

Spiritual worship is also centered upon the Scriptures. *Worship that is not scriptural is not spiritual.* Jesus struck at this when He rebuked Israel's religious leaders by quoting the prophet Isaiah. Of the religious state of the nation, the Lord said:

These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far away. Their worship is a farce, for they replace God's commands with their own man-made teachings.
(Emphasis mine, Matthew 15:8-9, NLT)

The Lord also told the disciples: "**But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth**" (John 16:13). The Spirit inspired the writing of Holy Scripture (2 Peter 1:21), and the Scriptures testify concerning Jesus Christ (John 5:39; Luke 24:27). Scriptural worship is spiritual worship because the Scriptures are centered upon Jesus Christ. John Stott wrote: "All Christian worship, public and private, should be an intelligent response to God's self-revelation in his words and works recorded in Scripture."²⁹

Worshipping in the Way

Categorically, Jesus Christ stated, "**I am the way . . .**" (John 14:6). The worship due to the Father must pass through the Son, "**For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,**" wrote the Apostle Paul (1 Timothy 2:5). Yet there exists a growing consensus among "worshipping evangelicals" that Jesus is not exclusively the Way of salvation (See Footnote 15), and herein lies the hypocrisy for emergent-ecumenical evangelicals who attempt to create worship experiences that get high on excitements but are low on truth. The following syllogism expresses the attitude of many contemporary Christians toward truth:

Love is unity—"Kumbaya!"

Strong beliefs separate Christians from one another.

Therefore, Christians possessing strong beliefs do not love.

Because lovers view that "doctrine divides"—and it does—they reduce truth to the lowest common denominator and substitute aesthetic and mystical means to create cozy feelings of worship togetherness (i.e., music, incense, candles, chanting, dancing, drama, etc.). Thus, one scholar insightfully noted a generation ago:

The only way to bring the different Christian traditions together in worship is to tone down doctrine and emphasize ceremony and ritual . . .

. . . Religious ritual without doctrine ultimately becomes self-mystification, and points in the same direction as the "religious" use of L.S.D.: toward feeling and "experience" which cannot be interpreted or communicated.³⁰

Because Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Taoists, or Animists, or whoever, do not worship the same God, ecumenical worship sourced in pluralism and syncretism is no worship at all because the various religions cannot even agree upon who God is. For example, Christians believe that Jesus is God and worship Him (1 John 5:20-21). Jews and Muslims do not. Vague unity therefore, can only be found in some lowest common denominator, in the lower nature that is common to humanity, the flesh, and we must know that "the arts" can't change people's hearts. Only the Spirit and the Scriptures are capable of doing that.

Conclusion

Christians ought to be cautioned about basing their worship on anything other than God's Holy Word. We must come to Him on His terms and not our own. If we come to Him on our terms, then the worship is all about us and not Him. Church worship must not be based upon the contemporary culture or church traditions, whether ancient or modern. Christians ought to recognize the grave danger of substituting tradition for truth for to quote again Jesus' castigation of the scribes and Pharisees from the prophet Isaiah, "**This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men**" (Matthew 15:8-9, KJV).

As Jesus informed the Samaritan woman whom He encountered at the well, authentic worship can only take place in the sphere of spirit *and* truth. Thus one early Baptist confession, *The Philadelphia Confession of Faith*, summarizes:

[T]he acceptable way of worshipping the true God, is instituted by himself, so that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations, or any other way, not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures.³¹

If evangelicals seek to derive worship experiences from ancient traditions or contemporary culture, they will become bound to those bases and turn worship from the wonder of the Word into a wasteland of the world. Worship will be so carnal minded that it is of no spiritual and heavenly good.

ENDNOTES

¹ Emphasis mine, congregant Reggie White quoted by Electa Draper, "Finding faith in the wilderness," *The Denver Post*, March 3, 2009 (http://www.denverpost.com/search/ci_11707039)

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ W.E. Vine, "Worship," *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, by W.E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, Jr. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984) 1247.

⁷ I even heard of one church in which the congregation, as if they were occupying a luxury suite at a professional sporting event, sit in their seats and enjoy a meal as they watch worship happening.

⁸ James L. Snyder, "Foreword," *The Pursuit of God* by A.W. Tozer (Camp Hill, Pennsylvania: Wing Spread Publishers, 1982) 1.

⁹ John 4:24 may literally be translated, "The God is spirit" (πνευ`μα οΥ θεου). In such a construction, "spirit (πνευ`μα) is in the emphatic position "stressing the nature or essence of God (the KJV incorrectly renders this, 'God is a spirit')." Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996) 270.

¹⁰ Paul wrote to the Romans: "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 of worship. And do not be conformed to this world . . . (Romans 12:1-2a). Note how the "spiritual service of worship" is to be pursued. Paul commands the readers: "And do not be conformed to this world." It suggests that worldliness is the antithesis and nullifier of worship. How can believers, who in their spirits are "conformed to this world," consider themselves to be engaging in the "spiritual service of worship"?"

¹¹ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, William Pringle, Translator (Albany, Oregon: The Ages Digital Library, 1998) 143.

¹² Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971) 271.

¹³ The Hebrew verb "joined" (Numbers 25:3, 5; Psalm 106:28) carries a sexual nuance about it. The context evidences this where the narrative recorded that, "**the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab**" (Emphasis mine, 25:1). Also, when he saw one of Israel's sons enter a tent with a Midianite woman, Phinehas "**took a spear in his hand [and] went after the man of Israel into the tent, and pierced both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through the body**" (25:7-8). Evidently, in the midst of their being conjoined, Phinehas speared the couple. Regarding this incident, Hartley comments that the verb "joined" describes "the seduction of the Israelites to idolatry at Baal-Peor under Balaam's suggestion to Balak, the King of Moab . . . The people sacrificed to their gods, ate, worshipped, and participated in cult prostitution. The entire activity is powerfully described as yoking oneself to Baal-Peor. Perhaps the verb indicates that the people even bound themselves to this false worship in covenant. This verb connotes how flagrantly obstinate their rebellion against Yahweh was." James E. Hartley, "1927 𐤇𐤍𐤏," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Volume II, R. Laird Harris, Editor (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980) 769.

Hartley also notes Snaith's observation that the Greek translation of Psalm 106:28 (LXX, Psalm 105:28) translates the Hebrew verb "joined" (𐤇𐤍𐤏) by the Greek verb *teléō*. The Greek historian Herodotus employs the Greek verb (*teléō*) to describe the initiatory rites of the cult of *Bacchus-Dionysos*, the statuesque male god who inspired ecstasy and ritual madness via drinking wine. *The History of Herodotus*, Book 4: Melpomene, Section 79, G. C. Macaulay, Translator, 1890 (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/hh/hh4070.htm>). As it infers the sacred-sexual, the verb "joined" (𐤇𐤍𐤏 - *teléō*) also possesses an occult meaning that combines sexuality with occult spirituality.

¹⁴ The transfer of the fire perhaps finds illustration in the manner that the Olympic Torch is transported from the site of the previous Olympic Games to the current venue.

¹⁵ See Allen P. Ross, *Holiness to the Lord, A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002) 233-234.

¹⁶ In the places of God's choice, Yahweh's altars were to be built with plain stones, and in their ministry, priests were not to expose the slightest nakedness (Exodus 20:26-27). Why did God mandate such? In the ancient world, it was common for altars to be built with carved stones. To enhance their "worship system," pagans sought to enhance the aesthetics of their altars via creative and artistic means. It was also not unknown for ancient priests "to perform every ritual in a state of nakedness." U. Cassuto,

A Commentary on the Book of Exodus, Israel Abrahams, Translator (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1967.) 257. In contrast to Sinai Law (Exodus 28:42), Currid comments that "priests of pagan cults often directed worship while in the nude." He also adds that in contrast to the fertility cults of the ancient world, the Lord's law prohibited "the inclusion of any sexual elements into the worship of Yahweh." John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, Volume II (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2000) 61. Compare James B. Pritchard, Editor, *The Ancient Near East, An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958) Pictures 128, 129, 133, 135, 154. The application to today's evangelical churches is obvious. In the name of relevance, trying to keep up with the culture by borrowing from the culture can become a slippery slope.

¹⁷ Indeed this is happening. First, with its audience-driven philosophy of doing ministry, the evangelical church accommodated the *style of its worship* to the culture. But now as polls indicate, the evangelical church is also compromising the *substance of its worship* to the culture. In their internal studies, some mega-churches are discovering that a majority of their members no longer believe Jesus is the only way of salvation. See "Survey: My way isn't the only way to earn salvation," *The Indianapolis Star*, Tuesday, June 24, 2008, A1, A6.

¹⁸ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, William Pringle, Translator (Albany, Oregon: The Ages Digital Library, 1998) 143.

¹⁹ "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15b). Personally, I wonder if the current trend toward "emergentism" among evangelicals is not the result of the fact that over the last generation they did not find real spiritual life in the "audience-driven" forms of worship megachurches adapted and copied from the contemporary culture.

²⁰ In concert with the Old Testament's ban upon Israel adopting the pagan places and practices of worship for reason of Yahweh's selection of Mount Zion and institution of the ceremonial law (Deuteronomy 12:2-6; 2 Corinthians 7:12), Jesus' words too nullify the worship that takes place at sacred places and spaces of other religions (i.e., kneeling in the direction of Mecca, bowing before images of the Buddha, offering libations at Hindu shrines, etc.). Based upon Jesus' words, there should be no "worship wars"!

²¹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971) 272.

²² B.F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950) 73.

²³ I understand that when combined with the datives *pneumati kai alhqeia*, the preposition *en* means that worship must occur "in" (the sphere) and "consistent with" (the manner) spirit and truth. See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996) 372.

²⁴ Westcott, *Gospel*, 73.

²⁵ The same applies to prayer. Only regenerate believers possess the capacity to pray "in the spirit" (Romans 8:26; Ephesians 6:18; Jude 20).

²⁶ Calvin, *Gospel According to John*, 142.

²⁷ Dr. Peter Masters affirms: "In biblical worship, only one offering counts, and that is the offering made once for all by the eternal Son of God on Calvary's Cross. Nothing should be thought of as an acceptable offering, or as having any merit, apart from Calvary." Peter Masters, *Worship in the Melting Pot* (London: The Wakeman Trust, 2002) 19.

²⁸ On the occasions when I have visited congregations that practice contemporary worship, I have noted the placement of the drum set. The flashy instrument, usually surrounded by a glass barrier presumably for acoustic purposes, occupies center stage. I ask: Is there a message in this?

²⁹ John R.W. Stott, *Your Mind Matters* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1972) 32.

³⁰ Harold O.J. Brown, *The Protest of a Troubled Protestant* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1969) 35-36.

³¹ *Philadelphia Confession of Faith*, being *The London Confession of Faith* adopted by the Baptist Association 1742 (Sterling, Virginia: Grace Abounding Ministries, Inc., 1981) XXII.1, 43.