What Exactly Is A “Worship Service”?

Most conventional churches practice something they refer to as a “worship service”. It is nowhere described in the Bible but it is carried out every Sunday (or Saturday for the Sabbatarians) in just about every so-called Christian church around the world, except perhaps in some persecuted, underground churches and a few other churches that have broken away from the “status quo”. What most folks call a “worship service’ is a routine that is most likely patterned after the Catholic church or various ancient pagan religions.

The purpose of this article is not to offend the many dedicated pastors and elders who work tirelessly to serve their congregations, thinking they are doing what God wants them to do. But it is meant to get people to see the unbiblical nature of this very common practice that few folks ever seem to question – in order that the saints of God may learn a better way of “doing church”. If fact, I think it is safe to say that it is the desire of our Lord that church leaders not work so hard… when what they are doing is actually counter-productive to the health and spiritual growth of the flock. Instead, shouldn’t the most mature believers in any local body be delegating and disciple making and striving to provide an environment where fellow believers can best recognize one another’s needs and best make use of their gifts and talents?

So instead of mindlessly going down the same road week after week, lets stop the cart we are on, for just a brief moment, and stand back from the road and take a look at the “big picture” and not just all the “parts” that we seem to get so preoccupied with. Maybe, just maybe, many of the problems that church leaders and church members experience (bad doctrine, incorrect practices, being tossed to and fro, needs not being met, gifts not being utilized, feelings of isolation, etc.), are the result of worshipping the Almighty according to man’s ways instead of according to God’s way. So lets take a look now at this thing called a worship service…

An analogy of a “worship service”

Usually on one specific day of the week (typically Sunday) and usually in the morning, shareholders (church members) and chairmen (church leaders) gather at corporate headquarters (conventional institutional church) for a weekly meeting (worship service). Headquarters is usually a fairly good sized special purpose building that the shareholders have scrimped and saved to purchase for the sacred corporate ceremony carried out every Sunday. This building usually represents a huge investment in time and money – often vastly more money than is spent on evangelistic missions and any local evangelism efforts.

The chairmen of the corporation frequently remind the shareholders to not forget to invest in this money-pit (I mean… the impressive headquarters building). In fact, based on the proportion of time and money spent, the support of the headquarters building is often given far more preeminence than the lost souls in the neighborhood and the needy in the local congregation.

When "worship" day rolls around, all shareholders (attendees) file neatly into rows of seats (pews) politely greeting other shareholders (parishioners or congregants) yet being careful to not go beyond superficial statements about the weather and such, so as not to disrupt the atmosphere of the upcoming solemn – and strictly business – shareholder meeting (worship service). The CEO (pastor) arrives and stands up at the podium (pulpit) in the front of the shareholders and begins a ceremony known as "corporate Simon Says". This is an roughly an hour or hour and a half long activity where the CEO tells the shareholders what to say, what to do, when to sit, when to stand, when to sing, and steps aside occasionally to allow chairpersons (duly elected elders or deacons) and a few designated spokespersons to entertain the shareholders.

At some point during these weekly shareholder meetings the CEO requests visitors to fill out a small printed form ("visitor card") so the chairpersons can contact the visitors during the week to see if they wish to become shareholders. The chairman then invites all shareholders and visitors to engage in momentary greetings and handshakes (pretend fellowship) by standing up and saying hello to all the people in the immediate vicinity around them, whose names they probably don't know and whose names they probably will never know. This greeting process is conducted as rapidly as possible, so that shareholders do not have to wait for a reply to "How are you?" before moving on to the next person being greeted.

The anonymity afforded by this arrangement is a wonderful feature of these corporations, protecting shareholders and chairpersons alike from nasty things like accountability and involvement in the lives of other shareholders and from having to get too personal with any "visitors". If the process begins to take too much time, the CEO will make a motion to the piano player or organist to start playing some music to get people to snap out of whatever state of friendliness they have gotten into… that is, if they have gotten too friendly and talked too long to any particular individual. If the corporation does not have a piano player or organist, the CEO will simply step up to his microphone and start talking about something (anything) so that the shareholders will not get too carried away with their pretend fellowship.

Thanks to the fake fellowship, the shareholders remember they are all part of one big happy corporate team, which makes a perfect time for the CEO to encourage shareholders to invest in the corporation. At which point a special container is passed around and the shareholders gladly deposit their investments (tithes & offerings) into the container.

Assuming the corporation is large enough to warrant specialized vocalists, the corporate entertainers (the choir) may be called upon at this point to do their musical routine to liven up the meeting and to make the shareholders feel like they are getting their money's worth for the time and money they invest in the weekly corporate meetings.

The CEO usually spends about a half hour to an hour telling the shareholders what the corporate instruction manual (the Bible) says so the shareholders don't have to read it and don't have to figure out for themselves what the writings in the manual really mean. Also, it would not be good for the harmony of the corporation if shareholders found out that the CEO was wrong about something in the instruction manual. So week in and week out the CEO gives his spiel (pretend discipleship) where no one is allowed to ask questions or challenge the CEO, lest we rock the corporate boat or make the CEO look too mortal, or even worse… lest we have to rewrite the corporate bylaws (our 501c3 constitution or our unbiblical statement of faith).

There is a periodic variation to the format of the corporate worship services. Typically once a month, a special event is included in the corporate meeting agenda. A "pretend meal" is served. This is also known as corporate "communion". This pretend meal consists of corporate cubes of bread – washed down with corporate shot glasses filled with precisely metered samples of corporate grape juice. Everyone is very quiet and solemn during this ritual, thinking that this is how ***their supreme CEO in the sky*** wants them to behave on his behalf, when in truth, HE uses words like "Father" to describe himself and what he really wants, is for ***His children*** to know each other as if they were brothers and sisters, which might actually require that they visit each other's homes and have *real* meals together… *on a regular basis*. Sounds awfully "quaint" nowadays does it not? Probably stifles "growth" too, right? After all, if the shareholders actually got to know each other, they probably wouldn't like each other and wouldn't come to anymore "shareholder meetings"… oops… I mean "worship services".

The shareholders know precisely when their corporate meeting ends… The CEO recites a few solemn sounding sentences (many CEOs like to use Numbers 6:24-26 for this purpose), and the shareholders sing the corporate song and then file out of the corporate building making trite comments to people whose names they may or may not know and whose houses they have never visited and whose problems and concerns they know nothing about and probably care nothing about since such information is of no real value to the bottom line – the perpetuation and prosperity of the CORPORATION!

Finally, the CEO or some other chairperson turns off the heat or AC and then shuts off the lights, ensuring that shareholder funds are not squandered on keeping the shareholders too comfortable otherwise they may end up staying too long and have meaningful conversations that might lead to real relationships, which would probably cause all kinds of havoc for the CEO and chairpersons… they might even end up without a job (at least one that draws a paycheck from the shareholders) if the shareholders got too friendly and too

independent from the chairman.

And so ends a typical "worship service".

Somehow the shareholders never get around to studying their corporate instruction manual (the Bible) on their own, especially regarding ecclesiology, else they would have learned that they were never supposed to form a corporation and never supposed to play "corporate Simon Says" each week. But rather they were supposed to conduct their meetings like family reunions. Their ritualistic meals should have instead been patterned after the kinds of dinners they have with intimate friends. But, just like in chapter 4 of the book of Genesis, we don't really want to be our brother's keeper, unless it is easy to do so and unless we can do it "our way". But it is never easy to do so, if we wish to really "worship" God the way He commands and desires us to worship Him. Just as husbands and wives may prefer to love their spouses the way they want rather than the way the spouse wants to be loved, likewise, the sin nature in believers wants to worship God the easy way. But this is how God wants to be worshipped:

> "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" [1John 4:20]

> "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." [1John 3:16-18]

What is really "worshipped" during these typical "worship services"?

What happens at these gatherings usually consists of people putting into practice the commandments and doctrines of men, man-made ritual, and the flesh – and its desire to feel it has done its religious duty… none of which has anything to do with what Christ was referring to in John chapter 4 about worshipping God in spirit and truth:

> "YE WORSHIP YE KNOW NOT WHAT: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipper shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." [John 4:22-24]

Do you really think that God is happy that His children are singing lovely songs and listening to a “great sermon”, and yet they hardly know anything about most of the people around them in church? What are believers supposed to do when they gather together? How about: doing things that engender meaningful relationships, such as the things we see mentioned here in scripture:

> “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” [Gal 6:2]

> “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” [Col 3:16]

> “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” [Acts 2:42-47]

If I have stepped on toes or incited a riot, good! That is usually what it takes (i.e. a lot of prodding and cage rattling) for Christ’s sheep to get back on track to where they are really supposed to be when they are far off track.

> “My people hath been lost sheep: their shepherds have caused them to go astray, they have turned them away on the mountains: they have gone from mountain to hill, they have forgotten their restingplace.” [Jer 50:6]

> “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, *as I delivered them to you*.” [1Cor 1:1-2]

We are to shun the profane rituals of the world and its religiosity and man-pleasing pomp:

> “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his

> subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." [2 Cor 11:3]

In fact, by *properly* adhering to the "**regulative principle**" of worship, Christ's bride should find itself acting a whole lot different from the world, not only when they gather together to break bread and fellowship, but also when out in the world among those who are unsaved. Also Christ's bride should not be satisfied with the superficiality of "churchianity" (i.e. counterfeit religion). But there is MUCH to unlearn for those of us who have been in that system most or all of our lives. Old habits die hard! May God richly bless YOU as you seek to worship Him in spirit and in truth!

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