

13. Destroying the New Testament Pattern with New Words: Contemporary Service

Contemporary service describes the effort to include innovations in worship under the guise of being more modern and “with it.” These appeal to worshipers uninformed about the scriptural pattern.

Contemporary service.

What will they say? *Contemporary service* describes a service constructed to fulfill the requirements of the innovators’ idea of what worship is. The term is usually heard where the change agents have divided the church and have some following them into the great apostasy and others who will not give up the New Testament pattern for worship. The compromise is to let one group meet in a contemporary worship and the other group meet in a traditional service.

Justification often comes in the form of saying that those of the denominations will be more comfortable when the church is less strict in following the scriptural pattern of worship.

When the error runs full course overtaking the entire church, the only worship will be the so-called contemporary service. In some churches, the elders resist the contemporary service and the change agents undermine them until they are asked to step down as elders. The contemporary service will have all the trappings of denominationalism and sectarianism. There will be the unauthorized, people-centered acts of worship—hand clapping, arm waving, applause, shouting, etc. These will combine with unauthorized methods of presenting material and performances—drama, choruses, choirs, solos, and other forms of entertainment—all of which may be entertaining to spectators and participants, but are without New Testament precedent. One church wires its lead singers to make the singing more exciting and professional. Another church offers drama, plays, and skits to celebrate the various religious holidays.

What does the Bible say? God’s approved worship does not change with time. Heb 1:2 tells us: “2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son.” These last days continue until now. Jude wrote, “. . . that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.” Jude 3. Not only is the New Testament faith once for all delivered, it also is scripture: “16 All Scripture is inspired by God . . . 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” 2 Tim 3:16-17. It was the Lord who said, “The Scripture cannot be broken.” John 10:35. The restoration preachers had a saying: “If it is true, it is not new; if it is new, it is not true.”

Even the meaning of the word *contemporary* illustrates its seductive nature. The first definition in Webster’s Collegiate 10th Edition says, “1: happening, existing, living, or coming into being during the same period of time.” By definition, contemporary worship is not from the New Testament. The dictionary adds: “Marked by characteristics of the present period.” Out of the present period, have come new acts of worship with characteristics marked by the present time. The admonition of Paul is as fitting today as it was when he wrote it in 1 Tim 4:1: “But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.” Paul warns again of the dangers of deception tied to the times: “8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the *elementary principles of the world*, rather than according to Christ.” [Emp. Added] Col 2:8.

John wrote:

15 Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17 The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever. 1 John 2:15-17

To build worship around what is pleasing to the flesh, eye, and spirit of the world is to love the contemporaneous world. Where did hand clapping, arm waving, chorus singing, play acting, shaking, and dancing up and down come from? Not from God’s word but from the present, sinful world. For our friends who so love the contemporary, the warning of Paul still stands: “7 Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, ‘the people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play.’” 1 Cor 10:7. Innovators contemporary with Moses grew impatient with God’s plan and built an idol—a golden calf. Now when Paul said, “Do not be idolaters,” one might expect that the phrase *they built an idol* would follow. Not so! *They sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play* follows. How contemporary were the Israelites. How timely is the warning to the Corinthian church and to all of us.

Another group of contemporary worshipers departed from God's will in Rom 1:18-26: They were described as men, ". . .who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." Since God had revealed himself, ". . .they are without excuse." Paul wrote, "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened." They thought they were wise and built idols in their own form. Today men build worship in their own image and ideas. Of these idolaters of old, Paul tells us, "25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. 26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions." How contemporary were these idolaters of old.

Today's cry for contemporary worship with its call for a show of emotions—a show of feelings with shouting, and jumping with joy—has everything to do with worshiping and serving the creature, suppressing the truth as the "pattern of sound words." Such acts and attitudes of contemporary worship cannot be far from the "degrading passions" to which God gave over the men of old.

Faithful Christians resisting the innovations are treated as if they are the ones who are wrong. A preacher told one elder, "Why don't you just step down and get out of the way." In another congregation, faithful Christians received labeling names: argumentative, narrow, and unloving. Yet faithful Christians must resist these false teachers who attempt to storm the walls of the church, the house of God, and make captive of us all. See Col 2:8. This accommodation of error castigates against those faithful to the New Testament pattern for worship. Often, elders not wanting to divide the congregation accommodate the innovators and let them have two services—one, a contemporary service. Our response to those advocating the concept of the contemporary worship must be the response of John:

9 Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; 11 for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds. 2 John 9-11.