

Informal Formality

By Roger Huffman

If we listened to the voices around us, maybe even within us, you'd think the worse thing that could happen to us in 1999 is to be bored. Our children speak as if boredom is a fate worse than death. Could it be that there's more to this longing than the foolishness of the flesh that is thoroughly convinced that fulfillment is found in things that enthrall? God made people with a thirst for the awesome, the need to stand in awe of God, the Creator, for "***from him and through him and to him are all things***" (Romans 11:30). It is not foolish to long for awe. It's foolish to seek awe in things that break. It's foolish to seek awe in the created, instead of the Creator. Only the Most High God provides the awe that is essential for life.

Worship happens when we stand in awe of the Most High God. Through faith in Christ we have entered a life of worship, a life of standing in awe of God, a life lived in the fear of the Lord. Gathering for worship with fellow believers brings us together before the awesome God at Christ's cross. A Christian worship service needs to communicate the transcendence of the Living God. He is the Most High God who dwells in light unapproachable. At the same time he is Immanuel, God with us, to reconcile and restore us into communion with him. Awesome!

Worship that forgets transcendence hides the awe of our God and falls flat. The Most High God is revealed in the word, communicated through God's gifts of the arts - speech, music, visual art, architecture. God's transcendence is communicated in Christian worship that is ***informally formal***. That sounds like a contradiction, but it isn't. It merely reflects the mystery of the gospel.

Formality in worship reflects that God is the Most High God. He is far above us. Informality in worship reflects that the Most High God has come to us and made his home with us, calling us his children who are free to intimately address him as their dear Father. Informality in worship celebrates and cultivates our bond as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Consider the alternative. Formality without informality has two impacts. It confirms the false faith of the self-righteous fools who are convinced they do worship the right way or it makes worship a terror, leaving the impression that God is stiff, distant, cold, and angry. This message crushes and kills the guilty, confirming their condition as fear-filled hopeless fools.

Informality without formality tends to reduce Jesus to my buddy, just one of the guys. Treat the Son of God like that and pretty soon the people will start telling Jesus what he should have taught. They'll start demanding answers from Jesus on their terms, forgetting that his ways are untraceable and unfathomable. This kind of service cultivates self-worshipping fools who find awe in a mirror.

Don't let the fear of boredom rule you. When boredom strikes, ask, "Have you seen the awe of God today?" Fill your life with a sense of awe by fixing your eyes on Jesus, who is truly out of this world. Cultivate transcendence in your private prayers, your family altar, and when you gather with your fellow believers in worship. Support your worship leaders as they strive for a worship environment and services that balance formality and informality to celebrate the nature of our God and our restored relationship with him.

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