

Who is the center of worship ---- God or Man?

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Introduction: There is a revolution going on in the denominational world.

- A. There is a movement that is center in “vineyard churches” that claim to break the “traditions” of the past and make “worship” the focus of the assemblies.
 - 1. When this movement speaks of “worship” they mean specialized teams of singers and performers. Choirs, bands and plays make up most of what is done in these groups.
 - 2. I was listening to a denominational broadcast this week where an older preacher talked about the beginning of this movement and how it become the norm.
 - a. He saw that the songs shifted from an emphasis of the nature of God and approaching Him to an expression of how the “worshipper” felt!
 - b. He maintained that most of the songs were very shallow at best.
 - c. The “preaching” was limited to a very short talk of little Bible depth.
 - 3. Today most churches now have separate services for “traditional” and “contemporary” worship.
- B. Not long ago the preacher at The Homewood church here in Birmingham spent considerable time in studying one of these groups as a model for the church.
 - 1. We need to examine these trends and stand on what God wants.
 - 2. We are now entering a time where these influences will affect those we love.

I. Worship is to be given to God!

- A. Worship must be God centered, not man centered.
 - 1. We need to be asking the question: “What does God really want?” The answer is: “Our Hearts!” (**Micah 6:6-8**)
 - 2. We become like what we worship. (**Psa 115:4-8; Psa 135:15-18**)
 - 3. Sadly men are encouraged to “shop” for churches like you would for clothes or a restaurant. Our only goal is to seek God. (**Heb 11:6**)
 - B. God has designed worship as the primary means of keeping our hearts right!
 - 1. God gives worship a very strong emphasis. (**Jn 4:23-24**)
 - 2. Our society is ill equipped to learn how to worship!
- "We are called to an everlasting preoccupation with God." - A. W. Tozer
- C. The main reason there is weakness and carnality in the church is our failure to worship.
 - 1. Could we come to services and the end result be worse for us? (**1 Cor 11:17**)
 - 2. What does God see and think about our worship? (**1 Cor 11:27-31**)
- “If we haven't learned to be worshipers, it doesn't really matter how well we do anything else.” - Erwin W. Lutzer
- 3. Occasionally I hear of a brother who had great Bible knowledge who fell into a web of sin. How did that happen? First look to his worship.
- “Worship renews the spirit as sleep renews the body.” - Richard Cabot
- D. We must have a worship that looks upon God and exposes our hearts! (**Heb 4:12-13**)
 - 1. What do you think of when approaching God in prayer? The Lord's supper?

Singing? Bible Study? (**Mt 15:8-9**)

2. Proper worship tests the heart! (**1 Cor 14:24-25**)

3. Many people try to stay busy and avoid their consciences. These people do not like to be alone with God! This is why a neglect of worship will lead to an indifferent hardness.

“It is the responsibility of gospel preachers to make people miserable who continue to sin. If unrepentant sinners sit comfortably through worship periods week after week, something is wrong. Peter brought the People at Pentecost to see their sin. The people were miserable as a result, asking, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Peter showed them the way out of their misery in the words, “Repent and be baptized...in the name of Jesus Christ” (**Acts 2:36-38**). Three thousand obeyed and replaced their misery with joy in the Lord. Misery! Followed by salvation in Christ.” --- Bill Hall, Evangelist.

II. A Biblical examination of modern day trends

A. Women are encouraged to take leading roles in the assemblies.

1. The Bible teaches that women are not to take a leading role in the assemblies. (**1 Cor 14:33-37**)

2. Women are not to take a leading role in other circumstances. (**1 Tim 2:11-14**)

3. Over the years things have been introduced in “youth meetings” and Bible classes. Some youth meetings it was proclaimed that it was not a “worship service.”

4. Some groups have women passing the communion and contribution trays.

5. Now special groups such as “worship teams” and female performers in dramatic plays are being introduced in assemblies.

“A second example follows the same path. This time it relates to the controversy over an expanded role for women in the work and worship of the church. Once again, for some among us, it has less to do with any studied re-examination of Scripture on the issue than meeting a perceived need. What one hears over and over is the none-too-subtle justification: “If we don't allow women greater participation in the worship, we'll lose them—especially the younger ones—to other churches.”

“... And, of course, we're only kidding ourselves if we think that being socially conscious enough to “allow” women to pass communion trays or to read the scripture during the worship hour is going to satisfy their perceived need for greater inclusion. (I, too, would find that to be a demeaning compromise.) Besides, what you might gain among some women you might just as easily lose when others (both men and women) can no longer conscientiously join in the worship.” (F. LaGard Smith, The Cultural Church)

6. Those who object are often treated badly.

“Not only was Truth compromised in most of the messages at the Jubilee meeting, some of the practices were so unscriptural as to be almost blasphemous. I will mention only those things I know personally to be factual.” He began his list. “(1) Though there were several women teachers there were no women's classes as such; all classes were open to both men and women regardless of the gender of the teacher.” He then pointed out that his wife, who was one of the invited teachers, refused to speak with men present, and saw to it that only women were present

in her class. As a result, he said, “Most of the women thought it “quaint” and “ol fashioned” but many publicly called it “legalism,” “lack of love,” “enforcing the letter of the law instead of the spirit,” etc. One young woman did everything but curse her in a bitter display of uncontrolled temper. When other women teachers were asked how they felt about men in their classes such replies as “it’s an honor to have them” or “it’s about time” or even “I’m so used to it I didn’t even give it any thought.” He went on to say that “When asked to explain 1 Timothy 2:11, 12 there was always a refusal to discuss scripture and the remark, “The freedom Christ gives us looses_us from the letter of the N. T. and lets us walk only by its spirit” The phrase “old traditions” was often heard.” He goes on with point number “(2) The women who taught classes had full control over the classes. Since classes taught by other women had many men present almost without exception the woman teacher called on a woman to lead a song and a woman to lead a prayer. (3) One of the male speakers did not show up for a major lecture and one of the women teachers was asked to speak in his place. (4) Jack Evans, one of the keynote speakers before the entire assembly, asked his wife to sing a solo before the congregation. After the first verse he asked the assembly to join her in singing the rest of the song. She was then the song leader. --- Virgil Hale

B. There is a shift from congregation worship to special groups.

1. The singing of the Bible is for a specific purpose. **(Eph 5:19; Col 3:16)**
 - a. We "speak", "teach" and "exhort" one another. This involves the teaching of God for each of us. **(Eph 5:18, Col 3:15)**
 - b. When we are with other Christians we are to sing to each other! When you see "one another" passages in the Bible you are seeing a "reciprocal pronoun" which indicates participation of everyone.
2. We also are to sing to God from our hearts. We must mean the words we sing! (Eph 5:19)
3. When you take all God has said on this subject this is all God has authorized. How will we glorify God? **(Col 3:17; Eph 5:20)**
4. If there is a group of Christians who sing to one another from the heart for the worship of God, then their actions are scriptural. Every Christian present should have an opportunity to sing.
5. Why have special groups? One church in Montgomery used hidden microphones to amplify the voices of their “best” singers.
6. Singing groups are being used in many churches to prepare Christians to accept false teaching.
 - a. This alone would not make singing groups wrong.
 - b. Some groups use their voices to make instrumental sounds. This is an attempt to prepare brethren to accept instrumental music in worship.
 - c. Singing groups are being used to promote an "inter-denominational fellowship."
7. What is the purpose of a play?
 - a. In our society plays are dependant upon good writing and good acting.
 - b. A class may use role playing as a teaching tool. Here the ones participating gain the benefit.
 - c. We need to think these things over very carefully.

C. There is common use of applauding as a sign of approval.

1. The Bible teaches that there is a proper way to express approval in worship.
2. There is a place for an amen. **(1 Cor 14:16-17)**
3. There was a setting in the Old Testament where God specifically instructed his people to say amen. **(Deut 27:11-17)**
4. Why say amen? It should be a true expression from the heart as a result of understanding and conviction. Should someone say: "Let's hear an amen?"
5. All that we do must seek the edification of the hearers and not just for a carnal excitement. **(1 Cor 14:5,26,40)**
6. What does clapping indicate?
 - a. There is no uniform meaning in any culture! How then can it edify?
 - b. When used *during* songs it often indicates an excitement over the music in a carnal way.
 - c. If we can clap with our hands could we not also use drums?
(Acts 11:28; 1 Cor 16:1-2; 1 Cor 8:11-14)

“In such churches the ordained worship practiced for so many years now becomes a source of embarrassment and efforts begin to "jazz-up" their worship by incorporating things seen in denominations. Out goes the old traditional songs and in comes new "contemporary music," even with instrumental music many times. Preaching and teaching is dull, so we bring in "drama." All of this is very pleasing to the carnal mind and entertaining. Before long each act is being applauded and often singing is accompanied with rhythmic hand-clapping. The "change agents" who are initiating such changes are not satisfied with the church as it has been through the ages.”
(THE CONFORMED CHURCH OF CHRIST?, Richard Guill, Seek the Old Paths)

D. There is a general effort to have “casual worship.”

1. The Bible clearly indicates there is an approach to God that requires “reverence.”
2. Immodest dress is becoming common in some groups.

E. Pentecostalism and emotionalism has made great inroads in some churches.

1. Years ago I heard Harold Comer talk about the things done at “youth rallies” at a college in Florence.
2. Now some are claiming to have “spiritual gifts!”

“Sitting under the tent at the Red River, New Mexico, Family Encampment June 22-26, 1996, The raucous, hand clapping, joking, laughing, casually-dressed crowds and speakers bore no resemblance to New Testament Christians in demeanor nor doctrine. My reaction was one of profound sadness and righteous anger for what heretics are doing to the body of Christ....”

“... Three predictable patterns emerged in all of the speeches.

- 1) The speakers believe in the direct operation of the Holy Spirit.
- 2) They believe and preach a subjective/experiential religion.”

“.... Full of himself, Shipp made joke after joke while relating a string of personal experiences and saying the Holy Spirit delayed a man's flight in Oklahoma City so Shipp could talk with him. The climax of his clown-act in this three-ring liberal circus was the evening he had the audience

"give God a standing ovation." Like sheep plunging into a canyon after a blind leader, the audience arose and clapped for God -- all except those of us from Arapaho, Oklahoma." (Baling Up The Liberals, Jerry C. Brewer - Seek the Old Paths)

3. Emotions by themselves are not reliable. (**Prov 14:12; Jer 10:23; Acts 26:9**)
4. Emotions should be a by-product of faith.
 - a. Where does faith come from? (**Rom 10:17**)
 - b. When you stir emotions without faith, where is the foundation upon which to live even when you do not "feel like it?"

Conclusion: Who are we trying to please?

- A. If it is the applause of men, then it will be the only reward we will receive.
 1. Jesus noted that this attitude was common! (**Matt 6:2,5,16,18**)
 2. Why are you here? (Illus. A young girl's piano recital)
- B. Brethren let us humbly bow ourselves before God so that we may clearly see.

The Growing Trend of Performance Worship

by Wayne Jackson

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Description

Does the Bible *specifically* address the issue of the growing practice of "worship-drama"?

Acceptable worship is a God-centered phenomenon. It involves not only an attitude, but also a submission to certain prescribed acts. Through worship, Christian people, grateful for divine redemption, pour out their souls in adoration to deity. When men, in their worship, seek to direct attention to themselves, instead of God, they seriously err. This is a truth that some learn too late (Acts 12:21-23).

In a previous article, we addressed the accelerating phenomenon of using choirs, soloists, etc., in the worship service of the church (**Christian Courier**, 12/93). In this article we wish to comment on the growing practice of "worship-drama." Increasingly, religious journals give publicity to the "drama groups" that are being formed in various congregations. Religious theatre is being promoted as a new method of evangelism for the baby-boomer generation, which, we are told, is not attracted to traditional preaching.

How should this topic be approached? Does the Bible *specifically* address the issue? Actually, it does not. But this matter, as with many others (e.g., gambling, drug use, etc.), must be approached upon the basis of biblical principles. There *are* divine guidelines that assist us in making spiritual decisions on issues of this nature.

First, it is freely conceded that God's inspired spokesmen occasionally used "visual aids" in the proclamation of divine truth. The prophet Ahijah tore his garment as a token of the coming division between the kingdoms of Israel and Judah (I Kgs. 11:30). Jeremiah purchased an earthen jar and smashed it in the sight of Judah's leaders as a preview of the impending destruction of the nation (Jer. 19). And the prophet Agabus bound his own hands and feet with Paul's belt to foreshadow the perils that would befall the apostle in Jerusalem (Acts 21:11).

While it is thus true that some teaching tools were occasionally employed in conjunction with the spoken word, the fact remains, nowhere do we find the primitive church using a dramatic production as a means of propagating the gospel. This is quite significant when one reflects upon the fact that the ancient Graeco-Roman culture was immersed in the drama motif.

In Paul's day, Corinth had a theatre that seated 14,000 people (Murray-O'Connor, p 36). Ephesus had a theatre that accommodated 24,000 (Frank, 312). In Rome, it is estimated that there were 3,000 actresses (Smith & Cheetham, 1, p 16). With the theatre-aura so permeating that society, is it not remarkable that there is not even a hint in the New Testament that the primitive saints employed drama to reach their contemporaries? The careful Bible student is impressed with the fact that the early Christians simply proclaimed the sacred message in a plain and unostentatious fashion. Where is the evidence for Christian "drama"? The New Testament silence regarding this practice speaks quite eloquently.

Second, in the sermon on the mount, Jesus warned about the danger of turning worship into a theatrical production. "Take heed," the Lord cautioned, "that you do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them: else you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven" (Mt. 6: 1). Christ illustrated this truth by mentioning several devotional items (e.g., the giving of alms, praying, and fasting). He condemned the actions of some who put their worship on display so as to attract the attention of others. He labelled them hypocrites (Mt. 6:2, 5, 16). Jesus went to the very heart of the matter when he put their *motives* in the spotlight. Rather than sincerely seeking to honor God, they were attempting "to be seen" of others. The Greek expression is *theathenai*. Robertson notes: "Our word *theatrical* is this very word, spectacular performance" (p 50).

When an environment is created within the assembly of the saints wherein one seeks to display his or her acting skills, and the applause of an audience is solicited, the spirit of the Savior's instruction has been grossly violated. With all that human adulation, in which the performer so delights, he has "received [his] reward" (Mt. 6:2b), which, in the original language, suggests that he has been "paid in full." As William Barclay noted: "If we aim at personal publicity, we get it - but we get nothing more" (p 53).

Third, the testimony of church history is decidedly against the drama-worship format. The tendency to use the stage as a means of teaching manifested itself in the early centuries of Christian history. Tertullian (c. 160-220) opposed the practice. Chrysostom (c. 347-407) protested the use of theatrics and complained that his audiences, instead of taking his messages silently to heart, looked for opportunities to applaud (Smith & Cheetham, 11, p 1953). Eventually, however, the theatre was imported into the church.

In his monumental two-volume work, **History of the Christian Church**, John F. Hurst devoted an entire chapter to "The Sacred Drama." He observed that in those days when Christianity became recognized by the state, the popularity of the theatre, along with the need for diversion, "forced upon the Church the endeavor to minister to the craving of man for the spectacular" (Hurst, p 922). It was out of this very circumstance that the drama of the "Mass" ultimately evolved.

The same lust for public acclamation afflicts some in the church today. Will history repeat itself? Let us pray that it does not.

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