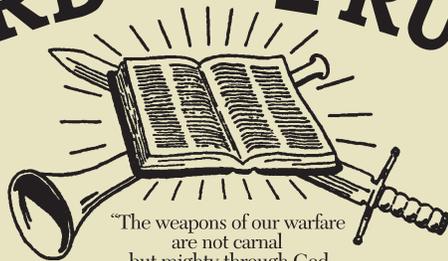


The SWORD and TRUMPET



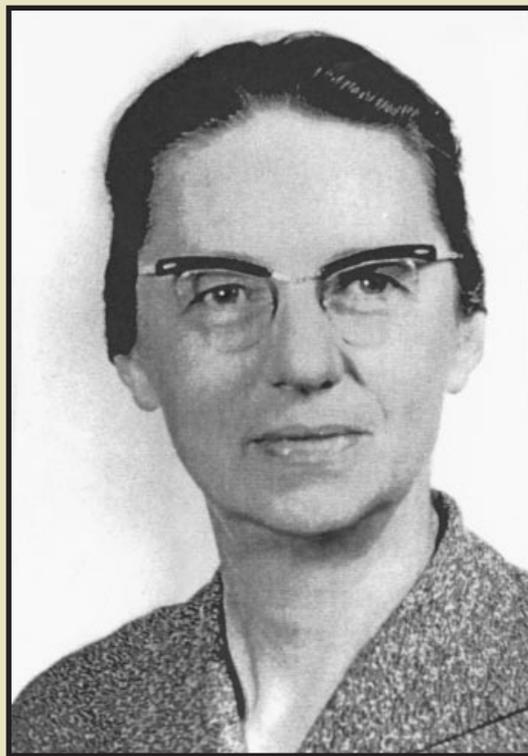
"Blow ye
the Trumpet
and warn
the People."

"The weapons of our warfare
are not carnal
but mighty through God
to the pulling down of strongholds."

"Take the Sword
of the Spirit
which is
The Word of God."

Guidelines

SPECIAL ISSUE: *Worship*



KATIE FLORENCE (BRUNK) SHANK

SEPTEMBER 2005

\$1.50

The Sword and Trumpet

Founded in 1929 by Geo. R. Brunk I

Vol. LXXIII

SEPTEMBER 2005

No. 9

SWORD AND TRUMPET GUIDELINES monthly magazine is a faith ministry directed by a Board representing various constituencies of the Mennonite Church. It is committed to defending, proclaiming, and promoting the whole Gospel of our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. It emphasizes neglected truth and contends for “the faith which was once delivered to the saints.” This publication exposes and opposes doctrinal error which compromises that faith and leads to apostasy.

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THE SWORD AND TRUMPET (USPS 615-540) is published monthly by *The Sword and Trumpet*, Inc., P. O. Box 575, Harrisonburg, Va. 22803-0575. Periodicals postage paid at Harrisonburg, Va. SUBSCRIPTION RATES: 1 year US \$12.00, 2 years US \$20.00. Bulk rates on the basis of US \$9.00 per year. Add US \$3.00 per year for countries outside USA and Canada. Telephone (540) 867-9419 or 867-9444. FAX (540) 867-9419. E-mail address: fcm@shentel.net.

Person of the Month:

Katie Florence (Brunk) Shank (1913-2005)

Katie Florence Brunk was born in Denbigh, Virginia, to George R. Brunk I and Katie Wenger Brunk on May 3, 1913. Her mother's namesake, she was one of nine children—four boys and five girls.

A significant, yet seemingly unimportant, meeting took place in 1927 when Katie was only 14. While attending her sister Stella's wedding, Katie met John Shank who was the brother of the groom, J. Ward Shank.

Katie went on to attend Eastern Mennonite High School from which she graduated in 1932.

The friendship between John F. Shank and Katie had grown and blossomed into love during her high school years and as a result John and Katie were married in 1933. God, in His wisdom, chose not to bless them with children of their own, but in 1940 a little girl named Donna was born. The Shanks were able to take her in as a foster child and were in the process of adopting little Donna when tragically Donna died in 1945 at the tender age of 5.

During these years in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, Katie was standing alongside her pastor husband. She was also able to take courses at Eastern Mennonite College, receiving her Bachelor's Degree in 1953. That same year the Shanks spent one year in Germany with the PAX service. After the Shanks returned home to Virginia, Katie earned her Master's Degree from James Madison University in 1958.

That same year John and Katie left for Jamaica where they spent twelve years as administrators of the Peggy Memorial Home for Girls. John was also pastoring one of the local churches.

After their years in Jamaica the Shanks moved back to Virginia, settling on a farm near the town of Broadway, north of Harrisonburg. During this time in her life, Katie spent a number of years teaching at New Market Elementary School.

Sadly, in 1985, Katie's beloved husband John, died suddenly in his sleep. This had a profound impact on her and she would often remark about heaven and her desire to see the Lord and her John. After John's passing Katie moved into the Virginia Mennonite Retirement Center where she lived out her days.

Katie Shank had quite a sense of humor. She was a strong-minded woman who was not neutral about anything. A woman of the Word, she read the Bible repeatedly, meditatively, and studiously, marking passages as she read. She had a devotional approach to the Scriptures. "Sister Katie" also had a particular heart interest in Israel and prophetic Scriptures relating thereto.

Katie was extremely creative; a lover of beauty. After John's death she was involved with ceramics. Even her meals were a work of art!

(continued on page 6)

God's Desire in Our Worship

"Such People the Father Seeks"

by Ronald Allen and Gordon Borrer

Perhaps one of the most unexpected aspects in a Biblical approach to worship is the fact that *God is actively seeking true worshipers*. Our age, so beset by humanism, tends to define all activities in reference to man and what he does. Even Christians cannot easily escape the moods of the age in which we live. We tend to muddle our thoughts with the thoughts filtering in from all around us. When we come to the issue of worship, we find ourselves prone to describe and define even this response in terms of ourselves.

But worship is about God, not man. The worship of God does do many things for us as individuals and as a community. But true worship should be defined in terms of God first of all. Worship is about God, and worship is what God desires from us.

The Tiger and the Lady

In one of his books, Thomas Howard has described our Lord as "Christ the Tiger."¹ An implication of this description is that the Lord Jesus Christ startles us at times with the unexpectedness of His words and actions: Jesus is no pussy-cat! He is Christ the Tiger!

Among the conversations of our Lord in His earthly ministry, one of the most unexpected and profound was the encounter He had with the much-married Samaritan woman at Jacob's well in Sychar, recorded in John 4:4-42. Tourists in the Holy Land today are sometimes left to their own devices when guides scratch an "X" on the ground and inform them that an event in the gospels took place right where they presently stand. But the well of Jacob in Sychar is not an imaginary,

floating location. It is a fixed place which one may visit today. You may even drink water from the well, if you are daring—and you will thirst again if you do so! The place is real and the conversation was stunning.

When the Samaritan woman diverted the conversation from her own troubled domestic life to the theology of worship, she gave our Lord an opportunity to express words that rivet our attention and rock our assumptions. She asked a question about *art*; Jesus responded with the issue of *heart*. She asked Jesus *where* worship ought to be done; Jesus responded with *what* worship is. That is, the woman asked about the state of the art; Jesus responded with an answer that relates to the state of the heart.

These are the central words of this magnificent encounter:

The woman said to Him,

"Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.

Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

Jesus said to her,

"Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father. You worship that which you do not know; we worship that which we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

"But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.

God is spirit,

and those who worship Him

must worship in spirit and truth."

(John 4:19-24)

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Zane Clark Hodges has summarized the importance of these words, so new and so fresh, in this narrative format.

Her expectation was not disappointed. She had raised the subject of worship, and the Saviour's reply was as pregnant a statement on this theme as had ever escaped the lips of man. Indeed, once He had uttered it, it would be impossible thereafter for any man intelligently to ponder this theme without returning to consider those priceless words. As an utterance on worship they were timeless and absolutely definitive.²

Among these timeless and absolutely definitive words are these: "*for such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers*" (v. 23). Many of our questions about worship are like those of the Samaritan woman. We ask where and how questions, for we want to settle issues of form. Jesus' answers cut across form to deal with reality, with spirit and truth.

Cain and Abel

God actively seeks true worshippers. This was not a new truth in the ministry of our Lord. It has always been so. From the earliest recorded acts of worship in human history we are confronted with this fact. Genesis 4 describes the offerings of Cain and Abel. Some readers have assumed that Abel's offering was accepted by God because his offering involved the blood of the firstlings of the flock, whereas the offering of Cain, lacking blood, was unacceptable.³ It is more likely, however, that Abel's offering was accepted by God because of his heart attitude. Cain's offering of grain or produce was certainly appropriate for a tiller of the ground (see, e.g., Leviticus 2:1; 23:9-14, for later legislation on grain and first fruit offerings).

There must have been an attitudinal difference between the brothers that caused God to delight in the one and

not in the other. The writer of Hebrews explains:

By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks (Hebrews 11:4).

It was *by his faith* that Abel pleased God. We may assume that Cain lacked the faith of his brother. Further, we may observe that God "*had regard for Abel and his offering*" (Genesis 4:4c). It was not the offering alone, but Abel as well that pleased the Lord. Similarly we read, "*but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard*" (v. 5a).

Rather than concentrate on why one offering was accepted and another was not, we should really stand amazed that either offering was accepted by God.

The Hebrew verb translated "had regard for" is the word *sha'ah*. This is a word that expresses the concept of "gazing at, looking at, and caring for."⁴ From the beginning, God was looking for true worshippers. The Lord Jesus is the One who explains the Father (John 1:18). His explanations are sometimes given in new words, but they are not necessarily new explanations. The Father has desired true worshippers from the beginning of His relationships with mankind.

We should observe that God's desire for worship does not imply that there is something lacking in Himself. He does not *need* our worship. In the eternities that preceded our creation, God has always been complete, perfect, and sufficient. But God the creator desires the adoration of His people. He looks for it. He gazes out for it. He cares about it. When we come like Abel came, we find ourselves in the center of His desire.

The Law and the Prophets

And with the above assertions we find both the Law and the Prophets are

in full agreement. One of the splendid texts in the Torah of Moses that summarizes God's desire for His people is Deuteronomy 10:12, 13.

“And now, Israel, what does Yahweh your God require from you, but to fear Yahweh your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep Yahweh’s commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?”

(Deuteronomy 10:12, 13)

This text (which builds on the *shema'* of Deuteronomy 6:4-9)⁵, uses the Hebrew verb *sha'al*, “to ask,” here in the sense “to require.” God has a desire regarding man which He expects, looks for, and demands.

The emphasis in this text—as in all Scripture—is not on what the believer does in isolation, but on what the believer *is*, and how what the believer is relates to what he or she does. Keeping the commandments is conjoined to loving God; obeying His statutes proceeds from fearing God; serving God is a matter of one's entire being. So it is with our worship.

The prophet Micah presented the same point of view some seven centuries after Moses wrote Deuteronomy. Micah pictures an individual coming before the Lord asking what is necessary to be pleasing in His eyes:

*With what shall I come to Yahweh
And bow myself before the God on high?
Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings,
With yearling calves?
Does Yahweh take delight in thousands of rams,
In ten thousand rivers of oil?
Shall I present my firstborn for my rebellious acts,
The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?* (Micah 6:6, 7)

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In words that begin with clear demands of Scripture (bowing and sacrificing), the claimant then ponders if God is really delighted in the superfluity of animals and oil, or whether even child sacrifice will be demanded to allow one to come before the Lord.

Micah then reminds the questioner of the teaching of Deuteronomy:

*He has told you, O man, what is good;
And what does Yahweh require of you
but to do justice,
to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?* (Micah 6:8)

God requires something within us that leads to outward acts of genuine spirituality. The sacrifice of all the cattle of Kansas would avail nothing before the Lord without the inner reality of spirit and truth.

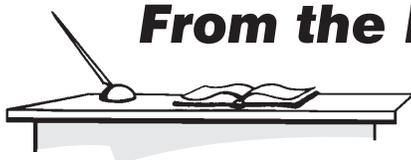
Moses and Micah build on the experience of Abel and lead to the explanation of Jesus: God *desires* true worshipers. He actively seeks those who relate to Him from the inner man, from the heart. True worshipers come before the true God in spirit and truth. ■

—From *Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel* by Ronald Allen and Gordon Borrer. © 1982 Multnomah Press.

ENDNOTES

1. Thomas E. Howard, *Christ the Tiger: A Postscript to Dogma* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1977).
2. Zane Clark Hodges, *The Hungry Inherit*, rev. ed. (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1980), p. 18.
3. The *blood* is not without significance, however. See Hebrews 12:24 (and 9:22).
4. Hermann J. Austel writes: “The basic idea of *shā'â* is ‘to look at with interest.’ It is never a casual or disinterested glance.” *Theological Workbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, Jr., and B. K. Waltke, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), II, p. 944.
5. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (along with 11:18-21) serves as the basic *Credo* of Israel. This text is known as the *shema'*, because of the first word of verse 4, which in Hebrew means “Hear!”

SWORD AND TRUMPET



From the Editor's Desk

Paul M. Emerson

GUEST EDITORIAL

The Rules for Worship

by John Frame

It often surprises people to learn that God is not always pleased when people worship Him. We might be inclined to think that God should be thankful for any attention we give Him out of our busy schedules. But worship is not about God's thanking us; it is about our thanking Him. And God is not pleased with just anything we choose to do in His presence. The mighty Lord of heaven and earth demands that our worship—indeed, all of life—be governed by His word.

As early as Genesis 4, we learn that God “did not look with favor” on Cain and his offering (v. 5). In Leviticus 10:1-3, God destroys Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu because they “offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, contrary to his command.” (See also 1 Samuel 13:7-14; 2 Sam. 6:6, 7 [compare 1 Chron. 13:9-14; 15:11-15]; 1 Kings 12:32, 33; 15:30; 2 Chron. 26:16-23; 28:3; Jer. 7:31; 1 Cor. 11:29, 30.)

The first four of the Ten Commandments deal with worship in various ways. They regulate our dealings with the holy. The first forbids the worship of false gods. The second forbids the worship of any god (even the true God) by

means of idols. The third forbids wrong uses of God's holy name. The fourth requires us to remember his holy day. Scripture thus draws sharp lines between true and false worship. Condemnation of idolatry permeates the Bible. (In the New Testament, see Acts 17:16; Rom. 1:21-23; 1 Cor. 10:6-22; 2 Cor. 6:16; Gal. 5:20; 1 Peter 4:3; 1 John 5:21; Rev. 21:8; 22:15).

Therefore, it is a matter of utmost importance, literally a life-and-death matter, to know how to worship God rightly, according to His will. The wrong kind of worship provokes God's wrath, not His blessing. We may not do anything we please in God's awesome presence. Modern Christians are far too casual about worship. The letter to the Hebrews admonishes us to “worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our ‘God is a consuming fire’ ” (Heb. 12:28).

How, then, can we worship God acceptably? That is the crucial question. But before we answer that, we must answer another question, namely, How do we find out how to worship God acceptably? Where do we find the rules for worship?

To all Christians, the basic answer is "Scripture." God rules all human life through His word, and He thus rules worship by Scripture. But *how* do we use Scripture to regulate worship? On this question, different groups of Christians have given different answers.

Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, and Lutherans have taken the position that we may do anything in worship except what Scripture forbids. Here Scripture regulates worship in a negative way—by exercising veto power. Biblicist churches, however, have employed a stronger principle: whatever Scripture does not command is forbidden. Here, Scripture has more than veto power; its function is essentially positive. On this view, Scripture must positively require a practice, if that practice is to be suitable for the worship of God.

This regulative principle reflects a genuine insight into the nature of biblical worship. As we have seen, worship is for God, not ourselves. In worship, we seek to honor Him. Therefore, we must seek above all to do what pleases Him. To do this, we cannot trust our own imaginations. Nadab and Abihu trusted their own wisdom, and God judged them severely. Can any of us trust ourselves to determine, apart from Scripture, what God does and does not like in worship? Our finitude and sin disqualify us from making such judgments. For such a serious decision—potentially a life-and-death decision—we must seek God's own wisdom, the revelation of His own heart. We must ask the Scriptures what God wants us to do in worship. Then, as we worship, we must do those things—and only those things.

Scripture itself condemns worship that is based only on human ideas: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men" (Isa. 29:13). This word of God through Isaiah was

repeated by Jesus in Matthew 15:8, 9 and Mark 7:6, 7. Paul in Colossians 2:23 condemns "self-imposed worship," worship unauthorized by God.

Scripture, God's word, is sufficient for our worship, as for all of life. We must not add to it, and we dare not subtract anything from it (Deut. 4:2; 12:29-32; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Rev. 22:18, 19).² ■

—Taken from *Worship in Spirit and Truth*.
© 1996 Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.



KATIE BRUNK . . . cont'd.

The writer only had the privilege of knowing Katie the last seven years of her life. She always had a cheerful countenance and a word of encouragement. She loved to talk about her Lord and His Word and she had an inquiring, teachable mind right up until the last.

She had a way about her that made you feel cared for and loved. Although her body was failing, her mind was sharp and interested in the present and the future—not locked in the past. It was a joy to converse with her. She and the writer had at least one thing in common and that was the fact that she bore no biological children but she was the "Mother" of many who felt her mother's touch.

A charter member of Calvary Mennonite Fellowship in Harrisonburg, VA, Katie was faithful in attendance until the last year of her life when her failing health curtailed her attendance at the services, but she was always there in spirit.

She went "home" to heaven peacefully on April 1, 2005, a month shy of her 92nd birthday. She was buried beside her husband at Zion Mennonite Church Cemetery in Broadway, Virginia.
—Gail L. Emerson

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS



A Devotional Commentary



by David L. Burkholder

SEPTEMBER 4, 2005

The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit

Acts 2:1-8, 38-42

The lessons for the September-November quarter are taken from the Book of Acts. You will want to read Acts a number of times to keep up with the flow of events relating to the formation and advancement of the New Testament church. The Book of Acts is one of the most dynamic books of the Bible, filled with drama, suspense, and human interest. It tells the story of the empowering of the apostles by the Holy Spirit to carry out Jesus' commission to take His message into all the world, and the advance of that message in and from Jerusalem.

Today's lesson portrays the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to empower His disciples after His departure, and the subsequent and immediate effect their ministry had on the crowds in Jerusalem. On the day of Pentecost (the Feast of Weeks), fifty days after the Passover and now ten days since Jesus' ascension, the still fearful and timid disciples were gathered in prayer and waiting. In a sudden manifestation of divine power the Holy Spirit came upon them with the noise of a mighty wind, in visible tongues of fire, and of vocal expression in unlearned languages.

The phenomenon of "tongues" drew a large crowd and sparked their interest. Peter seized the opportunity to explain the situation (read context) and then launched into a pointed message regarding the ministry of Jesus the Christ and the crowd's complicity in having Him crucified. He went on to explain how all this was in fulfillment of prophecy and then ended with the subse-

quent resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

The effect on the audience was electrifying. Conviction seized hold of them as the full implication dawned on them. They had been party to the crucifixion of Jesus, their Messiah. To their credit, many experienced a change of heart and opened themselves to further instruction.

Peter's word to them was "Repent, and be baptized." He told them this was necessary to remove their sin and certify to them the gift of the Holy Spirit whose power they had just witnessed. He also instructed and exhorted them further in things pertaining to salvation and the new life in Christ (v. 40).

The result was that many responded to the message and were baptized, being added to the small group of believers. (See 1:15.) It is interesting to note in the next few chapters of Acts how the heretofore small group of believers grew exponentially in a very short time as a result of the preaching and miracle-working power of the apostles. (We'll notice more of this in subsequent lessons.)

We notice in verse 42 some of the essential elements for maintaining and growing in the Christian life: instruction, fellowship, prayer, and the observance of the Lord's Supper. The success of the early church depended on both divine and human elements. In this lesson we see a beautiful synergy of efforts for the blessing of man and the glory of God.

For thought and discussion

1. Read the background to the Book of Acts; also read the book itself. Be sure to note how the events it portrays fulfill the commission Jesus gave to His disciples in Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8.

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2. Are “tongues” a valid expression for today’s disciples? Explain your answer.
3. Discuss the various ways the Holy Spirit equips and empowers God’s servants today to carry out His mission in the world.
4. How much does a person need to know to become a Christian? What do you learn from this lesson?
5. Be sure to discuss the value of the Christian brotherhood in maintaining personal spiritual balance, and in effecting the work of Christ in the world.

SEPTEMBER 11, 2005

True Christian Brotherhood

Acts 2:43-47; 4:32-35

Groundwork for the church was laid through the preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost. In conjunction with Peter’s message, the Holy Spirit brought conviction to the hearts of the hearers and, as a result, many turned to the Lord for salvation. So the church was born, adding three thousand believers to the little group of Jesus’ followers that first day.

And now there was need for development, both spiritually, administratively (Chapter 6), and practically. Today’s lesson focuses primarily on the latter. Undoubtedly many of the people in the multinational crowd on the day of Pentecost were in Jerusalem to observe the Feast of Weeks (or First Fruits) as required by the Law. (See Exodus 23:14-17.) Supplies were needed to care for and feed this multitude.

The common bond of brotherhood created by their union in Christ also fostered a bond of commonality in the realm of material things among these new believers. They shared freely with one another, sacrificing personal possessions to do so (v. 45). But this sharing of material goods was subservient to the greater cause of spiritual development, worship, and fellowship (verses 46, 47).

The effects of Pentecost were not a short-lived phenomenon. Through contin-

ued preaching and teaching by the apostles and the witness of the believers, others continued to be added to their number (v. 47). It was a popular movement with popular support, at least for the moment. It wasn’t long, however, until strong opposition arose from the leaders of the Jewish religion. But in the initial stages, the new movement grew rapidly. (See 4:4; 5:14; 6:1a, 7.)

In our text verses from Chapter 4 we see a reiteration of the principle of commonality of goods. It is of interest to note that this sharing of possessions was not a legislated imposition, but a spontaneous movement motivated by true Christian love and concern. Those who had shared freely with those who had not—and no one lacked, neither giver nor receiver. The key we find in verse 32: They were of one heart and one soul and, we could add, of one purpose.

Notice how the power and grace of God was manifest in the preaching of the apostles and the lives of the believers (v. 33). That, coupled with the willing and free sharing of material goods continued to attract even more into the fledgling fellowship.

In verses 36 and 37, immediately following our text, we have the generous example of Barnabas who, “Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.” His act was no doubt typical of what many of the new believers did. However, as we observe in the next chapter, the unity and cohesiveness of the brotherhood was soon shattered by deception.

For thought and discussion

1. What was the purpose of the “signs and wonders” performed by the apostles, as mentioned in verse 43? (See Mark 16:17, 18.)
2. One of the tenets of Christianity is sacrifice. Note how it was portrayed in this lesson. What is the motivating factor for this principle?
3. In what way did this community of goods in the emerging church provide example for subsequent eras? What are some other New Testament Scriptures teaching this principle of sharing?

4. To what extent should Christians today attempt to achieve a commonality of goods? Is it a valid concept for today's church? You may wish to discuss this in your class.
5. While community of goods is a valid expression of Christian brotherhood, what are some other, and perhaps more important, factors necessary for the bonding of believers?

SEPTEMBER 18, 2005

Healing Power

Acts 3:1-16

In these early, heady days of the Christian church, God was continuing to manifest His miracle-working power through the apostles which resulted in attracting others to faith. Here in this situation in today's lesson, as we also saw in Chapter 2, God used a miracle which drew a crowd and provided opportunity for preaching the message of salvation.

Peter and John, though now released from the ritual obligations of the Law, nevertheless as loyal Jews continued to observe its requirements. At the afternoon hour of prayer they made their way to the temple. There at the entrance they observed a man, lame from birth, asking alms of those who entered to worship. This was his only means of support, and he chose a most propitious location to beg, as those entering the house of worship would undoubtedly be predisposed to acts of mercy.

In response to the lame man's plea, Peter turned to him and said, "Look on us." And he, expecting to receive alms, did so. Imagine his disappointment when Peter announced, "Silver and gold have I none." But, Peter said, I have something much better, something of superior value and permanence—healing in the name of Jesus.

To this the lame man responded in faith (v. 16) and, with the encouragement of Peter's outstretched hand, stood, walked, and leaped for joy. His immediate response

was one of worship, entering the temple with Peter and John, leaping and praising God with unrestrained joy. His exuberance soon drew a curious crowd. They immediately recognized him as the one who had for so long sat at the gate of the temple begging alms. And now they were filled with wonder and astonishment. What had happened to this man?

As the crowd gathered around the apostles and the healed man, Peter seized the opportunity to launch into a sermon. He immediately discounted any power of their own in causing the lame man to walk. And, he added, "Why should you marvel? Does not the God of our fathers have such power, He who raised His Son to life after you had Him crucified?"

Again, as on the day of Pentecost, Peter minced no words in fixing blame for Jesus' death (verses 13-15). But he went beyond mere blame. His purpose was to arouse a sense of guilt and then proclaim freedom through faith in Christ, the Messiah whom they had failed to recognize and whom they had condemned to death.

As you follow on to the end of the chapter in the context of our text, you will notice how Peter ably explains the new covenant relationship foretold by the prophets and instituted by Christ. He sums up the message with an appeal for them to repent and receive the blessing of God.

Not only was a lame man healed that day, but many thousands were healed spiritually.

For thought and discussion

1. Examine the role miracles played in the emerging New Testament church. Certainly God's power is not diminished, but why do we no longer see such dramatic displays of divine power in our day?
2. Were Peter and John wrong to continue to observe the requirements of the Law in going to the temple at set hours of prayer? Why, or why not?
3. Jesus said, "The poor you have with you always." Review the Christian obligation to share with those in need. Perhaps discuss some various ways this can be carried out by the local brotherhood.

4. Review again the complicity of the Jewish people in condemning Jesus to death. Note Peter's grasp of the situation in verse 13.
5. Think about how we can turn situations or conversations into a witnessing opportunity.

SEPTEMBER 25, 2005

Boldness to Witness

Acts 4:1-4, 23-31

Today's lesson text continues the narrative of last Sunday's which set the stage for the incident under consideration. We noted how the healing of the lame man brought a crowd together to whom Peter preached a pointed sermon on repentance. As we read into Chapter 4 we see that those who stood to lose the most through this new approach to God through personal relationship to Christ felt threatened, and exercised their power in an attempt to put a stop to this new movement.

We read in verse two that these officials were "grieved" (greatly disturbed; annoyed) that the apostles were preaching the resurrection. The Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection, and they were all disturbed at the large following the apostles were winning to their cause. Their influence and positions were being threatened by the preaching of these unlearned men. So they threw them into jail till they could set up a trial.

We've already noted the rapid growth of this new movement, increasing as it did by the thousands. We see in the intervening verses (see v. 17) that this was also of great concern to these self-important guardians of the status quo. So after examining them they let them go, but not without threatening them should they continue to speak and teach the things concerning Jesus the Christ.

As the apostles returned and rehearsed to their company what had taken place, there was not fear, but great joy. They lifted up their voices to God in praise and supplication, asking God for boldness and

power to continue witnessing to the things which they had seen and heard (v. 20). They knew they could not, in fact, dare not, keep quiet. Their petition was not for protection but for power.

These men who just a few short weeks before were powerless, afraid, and noncomprehending, now had their act together. They understood the teachings of Jesus, correlating it to prophecies of old, understanding the rift between the Old Testament Law and New Testament grace. They grasped the significance of a Spirit-filled and directed life and they embraced the commission of Jesus to proclaim this message to all men. They were changed men.

At the conclusion of their prayer meeting (v. 31) the Lord acknowledged their request and gave approval to their petition by shaking the place where they were assembled with supernatural power. This was accompanied by a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit, encouraging their faith and emboldening their witness.

The Spirit of God was at work, infilling and using willing men. May we, too, seek a fresh anointing of divine power to carry on the work of Christ in our day.

For thought and discussion

1. In this lesson we have the classic illustration of entrenched religion at odds with a new form. Is there still danger today that entrenchment may stifle the freedom of the Spirit? Discuss.
2. How could the assembled believers rejoice in the face of threat? Why were they so fearless? How would we react in a similar situation?
3. As Christian citizens we do need to be obedient to the civil powers, but obedience to God comes first. When it becomes necessary to disobey, what principles should guide our actions and responses?
4. Notice how far these apostles had come in their understanding of Jesus' teaching. There was an awakening of their understanding. What was the enlightening and driving force?
5. Why do not our prayer meetings shake the ground? ■

Newslines . . .

by Rebecca Good

incidents events occurrences facts illustrations episodes committees vignettes proceedings problems
experiences crises adventures transactions meetings tragedies scoops reports conferences happenings
bulletins questions reports affairs dramas encounters personages actions tidings et cetera

The Christian Left

The Christian Alliance for Progress, a new political group, announced its advent on June 22. This group's goal is to reclaim Christianity for the Democratic party. They plan to go head-to-head with conservative leaders such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and James Dobson, emphasizing equality, justice, and the teachings of Jesus about loving neighbors. Unlike Jim Wallace and others, who try to call Democrats to a more Christian ethic, this group says they want to present the biblical case for the socially liberal policies the Democratic party already espouses. The "ethic" of the alliance specifically upholds abortion rights and homosexual "marriage."

Commenting on the new political organization, Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council said that evangelicals are not tied to either Republicans or Democrats. "It's really not about labels, it's really about the issue."

—from *The Washington Times*

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Perfect?

Angela Beise, mother of a Down's syndrome child, muses: "I wonder, if our advanced technologies successfully eliminate the weak and needy, will future scholars, theologians, politicians, and poets, ponder: 'Why has our society become less loving, so selfish, so intolerant, so uncommitted to anything outside of individual gain? Why are we so full of selfish ambition and vain conceit?' Is this 'perfect' society a place where any of us would want to live?"

—from Angela Beise in *Christianity Today*

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Pure Intimacy

Nancy Anderson, an author and columnist at *Crosswalk.com* wrote a 2004 book called *Avoiding the Greener Grass Syndrome: How to Grow Affair-Proof Hedges Around Your Marriage*. The book explores how to cultivate marital faithfulness from the woman's perspective and outlines strategies: clear communication, encouragement, dating your mate, and paying attention to physical needs. Mrs. Anderson writes from the experience of her own foray into adultery at the age of 24; now she hears from hundreds of women facing the same temptation.

Mrs. Anderson says the number-one excuse women give her is "Don't I deserve to be happy?" They actually think that concept is in the Bible. Mrs. Anderson tells women, "We're all sinners. You don't want what you really deserve."

Infidelity is not just a man's issue. Some Christian counselors say that women's struggle with infidelity and sexual sin is a tremendous problem within the church. George Ohlschlager of the American Association of Christian Counselors said affairs can stem from issues such as marital or childhood emotional deficits or to spiritual immaturity. Many Christian women "are not practicing spiritual disciplines, and are not really pursuing an intimacy with Christ that would go a long way toward filling up some of those emotional needs."

Mrs. Anderson and her husband Ron show that it is possible to avoid—and recover from—infidelity and build a marriage that is genuinely intimate.

—from *WORLD*

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Good News From Iran

Hamid Pourmand, the Iranian Assemblies of God lay pastor who faced the death penalty in Iran was acquitted May 28. He was arrested last September, and faced bogus charges concerning failure to inform the army of his conversion to Christianity 25 years ago. He is a former army colonel. Pourmand was charged with apostasy and could have been executed, but his case attracted international attention.

At his acquittal, the judge reportedly told Pourmand, "I don't know who you are, but apparently the rest of the world does. You must be an important person, because many people from the government have called me, saying to cancel your case."

Pourmand is still required to serve a three-year sentence relating to his conversion, but is said to be in good spirits. "Don't worry about me," he said, waving to his family. "This prison is like my home now, you know!" —from *WORLD*

Is Therapy Good for Us?

Christina Hoff Sommers and Sally Satel of the American Enterprise Institute have written a book called *One Nation Under Therapy: How the Helping Culture Is Eroding Self-Reliance*. These authors see the present therapeutic mindset as a battle-front in the culture war, because many on the cultural left want to replace the old reliance on religion and ethics with reliance on secular relativism and psychology.

We see therapism on every hand. Mental health practitioners try to tell us that normal people are emotionally damaged and in need of "therapy." Teachers are as interested in building self-esteem in their students as in educating them. Some "experts" deem dodge ball too competitive for kids. Every bad behavior and addiction is labeled as a syndrome or brain disease. Sharing feelings is encouraged in almost every context.

Sommers and Satel say this is crazy. While there is real mental illness that should be treated, they present research that says there is not an intellectual basis

for much of the therapeutic counseling that goes on today. Some examples: Emoting does not guarantee healing and sometimes makes problems worse. Students with high self-esteem are not more likely to succeed than their classmates with lower self-esteem. In fact, sociopaths and prison inmates often have very high self-esteem. Most traumas of the soul heal themselves over time, with the best support coming from family, friends, and colleagues. America became a great nation much more through "Get over it" than "Do you want to talk about it?"

—from *The Washington Times*

Young Friends in Iran

Seventy percent of Iranians are younger than 30—they barely remember the Islamic revolution of 1979. This is probably the only broadly pro-American population in the Middle East. —from *WORLD*

The Musical Key

Bradley Lehman of Dayton, Virginia, has solved a centuries-old musical mystery. How did Johann Sebastian Bach tune harpsichords? In Bach's obituary, his son wrote, "In the tuning of harpsichords, he achieved so correct and pure a temperament that all the tonalities sounded pure and agreeable." However, the Bachs kept the tuning secret within the family and it was lost to the musical world. A strange scribbled design on Bach's 1722 *Well-Tempered Clavier*, a book about tuning seemed to offer a clue.

Tuning keyed musical instruments can be difficult because the whole and half notes of a scale cannot be made to fit into a scale in exactly the proportions that physics and geometry say are appropriate. Therefore, tuners have to compromise. The methods used to determine these compromises are called "temperaments." Depending on the key, some temperaments sound better than others. Today, most musicians and tuners use equal temperament, placing all the notes in a scale exactly the same dis-

tance apart. Equal temperament tends to be boring to listen to, and was shunned by musicians of Bach's day.

Did that flourish on Bach's book contain the secret? Reference books said the puzzle "couldn't be figured out, or else somebody would have done it already." The scribble was declared officially meaningless.

Hearing that two German researchers were now saying that the drawing might be a clue after all, the answer suddenly hit Lehman. The scribbles were a picture of Bach's tuning method. Bach was not good at writing and spelling and hated math, and so he doodled a picture of his tuning method. He apparently drew it upside down to hide the family secret.

Once he understood what Bach was trying to record, Lehman tuned his own harpsichord according to the Bach temperament. It sounded so beautiful, he cried. Then he started work on an article, over 100 pages long, to explain his discovery. That was in 2004.

Since then, the musical world has been very receptive. Now Taylor & Boody Organ-builders of Staunton, Va., have built Bach's temperament into Goshen College's new 1,604 pipe-organ—the first organ to be tuned this way since the 18th century.

—from *Mennonite Weekly Review* and *Daily News-Record*, Harrisonburg, Va.

A Fiscal Conservative?

George W. Bush may be remembered as one of our biggest Big Government presidents. Federal spending has grown at an annual rate of 5 percent during his presidency, more than during any administration since Lyndon B. Johnson. Even when federal spending to fight terrorism is removed from the budget, the president still a prodigious spender, is increasing federal spending by 4.8 percent. President Bush has committed future taxpayers to cover prescription drugs for Medicare recipients (even though most senior citizens spend more money at restaurants than on medicine), creating the largest

new entitlement since President Johnson. In light of the huge, aging Baby Boomer generation, this is especially disastrous. President Bush is not a fiscal conservative.

—from *World*

Dysfunctional Healthcare?

Under Canada's system of government-run universal health care, patients wait an average of four months for surgery and other treatments. Some specialized procedures have waits of more than a year. Canada is the only country besides Cuba and North Korea that has outlawed private financing for primary medical services. Many Canadians felt that their only option was to head south of the border and procure their own care in the U.S. Now, a significant support beam in Canada's failing health-care system may have been cracked. The Canadian high court has struck down Quebec's ban on residents financing their own healthcare within the country. Chief Justice Beverly McLachlin wrote, "Access to waiting lists is not access to healthcare." Will private care become available throughout Canada? The answer remains to be seen, but in the meantime, the U.S. can learn from their northern neighbor's mistakes as Americans try to solve their own Medicaid and Medicare mess.

—from *World*

The Heartbeat of the Faith

Where is the heart of the Christian world—its center of gravity? According to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity based in South Hamilton, Massachusetts, the demographic heart of the Christian world, the point on the globe where roughly the same number of believers live to the north, south, east, and west, is now located in Timbuktu, in the predominantly Muslim nation of Mali. Experts predict that by 2100, the Christian center of gravity will have slipped further south, to Nigeria. At that time, three times more Christians will live in the global South as in the North. *(continued on page 30)*

If You Worship on Sunday, What Happens on Monday?

by A. W. Tozer

Do you quietly bow your head in reverence when you step into the average gospel church?

I am not surprised if your answer is no.

There is grief in my spirit when I go into the average church, for we have become a generation rapidly losing all sense of divine sacredness in our worship. Many whom we have raised in our churches no longer think in terms of reverence—which seems to indicate they doubt that God's Presence is there.

In too many of our churches, you can detect the attitude that anything goes. It is my assessment that losing the awareness of God in our midst is a loss too terrible ever to be appraised.

Much of the blame must be placed on the growing acceptance of a worldly secularism that seems much more appealing in our church circles than any hungering or thirsting for the spiritual life that pleases God. We secularize God, we secularize the gospel of Christ, and we secularize worship.

No great and spiritually powerful man of God is going to come out of such a church. No great spiritual movement of believing prayer and revival is going to come out of such a church. If God is to be honored and revered and truly worshiped, He may have to sweep us away and start somewhere else.

There is a necessity for true worship among us. If God is who He says He is and if we are the believing people of God we claim to be, we must worship Him. I do not believe that we will ever truly delight in the adoring worship of God if we have never met Him in personal, spiritual experience through the new birth from above, wrought by the Holy

Spirit of God Himself!

We have such smooth, almost secularized ways of talking people into the kingdom of God that we can no longer find men and women willing to seek God through the crisis of encounter. When we bring them into our churches, they have no idea of what it means to love and worship God because, in the route through which we have brought them, there has been no personal encounter, no personal crisis, no need of repentance—only a Bible verse with a promise of forgiveness.

Oh, how I wish I could adequately set forth the glory of that One who is worthy to be the object of our worship! I do believe that if our new converts—the babes in Christ—could be made to see His thousand attributes and even partially comprehend His being, they would become faint with a yearning desire to worship and honor and acknowledge Him, now and forever.

I know that many discouraged Christians do not truly believe in God's sovereignty. In that case we are not filling our role as the humble and trusting followers of God and His Christ.

And yet, that is why Christ Jesus came into our world. The old theologians called it theanthropism—the union of the divine and human natures in Christ. This is a great mystery and I stand in awe before it. I take off my shoes and kneel before this burning bush, this mystery I do not understand.

The theanthropy is the mystery of God and man united in one Person—not two persons, but two natures.

So, the nature of God and the nature of man are united in this One who is our Lord Jesus Christ. All that is God and

all that is man are in Christ fused eternally and inextricably.

Consider the experience of Moses in the desert as he beheld the fire that burned in the bush without consuming it. Moses had no hesitation in kneeling before the bush and worshiping God. Moses was not worshiping a bush; it was God and His glory dwelling in the bush that Moses worshiped.

That is an imperfect illustration, for when the fire departed from that bush it was a bush again.

But this Man, Christ Jesus, is eternally the Son. In the fullness of this mystery there has never been any departure, except for that awful moment when Jesus cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). The Father turned His back for a moment when the Son took on Himself that putrefying mass of our sin and guilt, dying on the cross not for His own sin, but for ours.

The deity and the humanity never parted. And to this day they remain united in that one Man. When we kneel before Him and say, "My Lord and my God, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever," we are talking to God.

I think the prophets of God saw farther into the centuries and into the mysteries of God than we can with our great modern telescopes and electronic means of measuring light years and planets and galaxies.

The prophets saw the Lord our God. They saw Him in His beauty, and they tried to describe Him.

They described Him as radiantly beautiful and fair, a winsome being. They said that He was royal and that He was gracious. They described Him as a majestic being; and yet they noted His meekness. They saw Him as righteous and filled with truth. They tried to describe the manner of His love, with its gladness and joy and fragrance.

When the prophets try to describe for me the attributes, the graces, the wor-

thiness of the God who appeared to them and dealt with them, I feel that I can kneel down and follow their admonition: "He is thy Lord—worship thou Him."

He is fair and He is kingly, yet He is gracious in a sense that takes nothing away from His majesty.

He is meek, but it is the kind of meekness that likewise takes nothing away from His majesty.

The meekness and the majesty of Jesus. I wish I could write a hymn about that or compose music about it. Where else can you find majesty and meekness united?

The meekness was His humanity. The majesty was His deity. You find them everlastingly united in Him. So meek that He nursed at His mother's breast, cried like any baby and needed all the human care that every child needs.

But He was also God, and in His majesty He stood before Herod and before Pilate. When He returns, coming down from the sky, it will be in His majesty, the majesty of God. Yet it will also be in the majesty of the Man who is God.

This is our Lord Jesus Christ. Before His foes, He stands in majesty. Before His friends, He comes in meekness.

It is given to men and women to choose—a person may have either side. If he does not want the meek side of Jesus, he will come to know the majestic side.

On earth, the children came to Him. The sick and the sinful came to Him. The devil-possessed man came to Him. Those who knew their needs came from everywhere and touched Him, finding Him so meek that His power went out to them and healed them.

When He appears to men again, it will be in majesty. In His kingly majesty He will deal with the pride and conceit and self-sufficiency of mankind, for the Bible says that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He is

Lord and King.

To really know Him is to love and worship Him.

As God's people, we are so often confused that we could be known as God's poor, stumbling, bumbling people. That must be true of a great number of us for we always think of worship as something we do when we go to church.

We call it God's house. We have dedicated it to Him. So we continue with the confused idea that it must be the only place where we can worship Him.

We come to the Lord's house, made out of brick and wood and lined with carpeting. We are used to hearing a call to worship: "The Lord is in His holy temple—let us all kneel before Him."

That is on Sunday and that is in church. Very nice!

But Monday morning comes soon. The Christian layman goes to his office. The Christian schoolteacher goes to the classroom. The Christian mother is busy with duties in the home.

On Monday, as we go about our different duties and tasks, are we aware of the Presence of God? The Lord desires still to be in His holy temple, wherever we are. He wants the continuing love and delight and worship of His children, wherever we work.

Is it not a beautiful thing for a businessman to enter his office on Monday morning with an inner call to worship: "The Lord is in my office—let all the world be silent before Him."

If you cannot worship the Lord in the midst of your responsibilities on Monday, it is not very likely that you were worshipping on Sunday!

Actually, none of us has the ability to fool God. Therefore, if we are so engaged in our Saturday pursuits that we are far from His presence and far from a sense of worship on Saturday, we are not in very good shape to worship Him on Sunday.

I guess many people have an idea that they have God in a box. He is just

in the church sanctuary, and when we leave and drive toward home, we have a rather faint, homesick feeling that we are leaving God in the big box.

You know that is not true, but what are you doing about it?

God is not confined to a building any more than He is confined to your car or your home or the office where you work.

Paul's earnest exhortation to the Corinthian Christians is just as valid for our lives today as it was when he expressed it:

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are (1 Cor. 3:16, 17).

If you do not know the presence of God in your office, your factory, your home, then God is not in the church when you attend.

I became a Christian when I was a young man working in one of the tire factories in Akron, Ohio. I remember my work there. I remember my worship there too. I had plenty of worshipful tears in my eyes. No one ever asked me about them, but I would not have hesitated to explain them.

You can learn to use certain skills until they are automatic. I became so skillful that I could do my work, and then I could worship God even while my hands were busy.

I have come to believe that when we are worshipping—and it could be right at the drill in the factory—if the love of God is in us and the Spirit of God is breathing praise within us, all the musical instruments in heaven are suddenly playing in full support.

Well, it is my experience that our total lives, our entire attitude as persons, must be toward the worship of God.

What is there in you that strives to worship God? Faith, love, obedience,

loyalty, conduct of life—all of these strive in you to worship God. If there is anything within you that refuses to worship, there is nothing within you, then, that worships God very well.

You are not worshipping God as you should if you have departmentalized your life so that some areas worship and other parts do not worship.

This can be a great delusion—that worship only happens in church or in the midst of a dangerous storm or in the presence of some unusual and sublime beauty of nature around us. I have been with some fellows who became very spiritual when they stood on the breathtaking curve of a steep mountain cliff!

Occasionally we are in some situation like that and a person begins to yell, “Hooray for Jesus!”—or some other corny expression.

My brother or sister, if we are believing children of God in whom the Holy Spirit nurtures continual joy, delight, and wonder, we will not need a storm on the mountain to show us how glorious our Lord really is.

It is a delusion to think that because we suddenly feel expansive and poetic in the presence of the storm or stars or space that we are spiritual. I need only remind you that drunkards or tyrants or criminals can have those “sublime” feelings too. Let us not imagine that they constitute worship.

I can offer no worship wholly pleasing to God if I know that I am harboring elements in my life that are displeasing to Him. I cannot truly and joyfully worship God on Sunday and not worship Him on Monday. I cannot worship God with a glad song on Sunday and then knowingly displease Him in my business dealings on Monday and Tuesday.

I repeat my view of worship—*no worship is wholly pleasing to God until there is nothing in me displeasing to God.*

Is that a view that seems very discouraging to you?

Let me say that if you listen to me long enough you will receive some encouragement in the Spirit, but I have never had an inclination within me to encourage people in the flesh.

I have never had very much faith in people—as people. I do respect the good intentions that people have. I know they mean well. But in the flesh they cannot fulfill their good intentions. That is because we are sinners and we are all in a predicament—until we find the source of victory and joy and blessing in Jesus Christ.

There is nothing in either of us that can be made good until Jesus Christ comes and changes us—until He lives in us and unites our nature with God, the Father Almighty. Not until then can we call ourselves good.

That is why I say that your worship must be total. It must involve the whole you. That is why you must prepare to worship God, and that preparation is not always pleasant. There may be revolutionary changes which must take place in your life.

If there is to be true and blessed worship, some things in your life must be destroyed, eliminated. The gospel of Jesus Christ is certainly positive and constructive. But it must be *destructive* in some areas, dealing with and destroying certain elements that cannot remain in a life pleasing to God.

There have always been professing Christians who argue: “I worship in the name of Jesus.” They seem to believe that worship of God is a formula. They seem to think there is a kind of magic in saying the name of Jesus.

Study the Bible carefully with the help of the Holy Spirit and you will find that the name and the nature of Jesus are one. It is not enough to know how to spell Jesus’ name. If we have come to be like Him in nature, if we have come to the place of being able to ask in

accordance with His will, He will give us the good things we desire and need. We do not worship in name only. We worship God as the result of a birth from above in which God has been pleased to give us more than a name. He has given us a nature transformed.

Peter expressed that truth this way:

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (2 Peter 1:4).

Why should we delude ourselves about pleasing God in worship? If I live like a worldly and carnal tramp all day and then find myself in a time of crisis at midnight, how do I pray to a God who is holy? How do I address the One who has asked me to worship Him in spirit and in truth? Do I get on my knees and call on the name of Jesus because I believe there is some magic in that name?

If I am still the same worldly, carnal tramp, I will be disappointed and disillusioned. If I am not living in the true meaning of His name and His nature, I cannot properly pray in that name. If I am not living in His nature, I cannot rightly pray in that nature.

How can we hope to worship God acceptably when these evil elements remain in our natures undisciplined, uncorrected, unpurged, unpurified? Even granted that a man with evil ingredients in his nature might manage through some part of himself to worship God half-acceptably. But what kind of a way is that in which to live and continue?

“I want to dwell in your thoughts,” God has been saying. “Make your thoughts a sanctuary in which I can dwell.”

I do not have to do something wrong to feel blistering conviction and repent. I can lose fellowship with God, lose the keen sense of His presence and lose the

blessing of spiritual victory by thinking wrong.

I have found that God will not dwell in spiteful and polluted thoughts. He will not dwell in lustful and covetous thoughts. He will not dwell in proud and selfish thoughts.

God tells us to make a sanctuary of our thoughts in which He can dwell. He treasures our pure and loving thoughts, our meek and charitable and kindly thoughts. These are the thoughts like His own.

As God dwells in your thoughts, you will be worshiping, and God will be accepting. He will be smelling the incense of your high intention even when the cares of life are intense and activity is all around you.

If God knows that your intention is to worship Him with every part of your being, He has promised to cooperate with you. On His side is the love and grace, the promises and the atonement, the constant help and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

On your side there is determination, seeking, yielding, believing. Your heart becomes a chamber, a sanctuary, a shrine in which there may be continuous, unbroken fellowship and communion with God. Your worship rises to God moment by moment.

Two of Spurgeon’s greatest sermons were “God in the Silence” and “God in the Storm.” The heart that knows God can find God anywhere. I surely join with Spurgeon in the truth that a person filled with the Spirit of God, a person who has met God in a living encounter, can know the joy of worshiping Him, whether in the silences of life or in the storms of life.

There really is no argument. We know what God wants us to be. He wants us to be worshippers! ■

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A Better Way

by Brian Edwards

It is often assumed that the world in which the first-century church found itself was so different from today's world that we must search for a completely fresh approach to worship and evangelism. This assumption is frequently the basis for justifying extravagantly new ideas. We can do almost anything, and if challenged to find a biblical foundation for it we can comfortably retreat into the argument that "Things are different today." Let's examine that claim. It will not take long, but the conclusion may be rather uncomfortable.

The First-Century World

The first-century Christian church grew up in a society which was squandering its great achievements in technology and culture by an insatiable lust for power and pleasure. Rome was a brilliant empire that stamped its peace, prosperity, and magnificence halfway across the world. The power of the Roman Empire lasted for nearly a thousand years, and when the barbarians almost snuffed out its light the influence of Roman thought and culture managed to survive the thousand years of the Dark Ages, to be revived at the fourteenth-century Renaissance. When Peter and Paul came preaching the gospel it was already evident that something was sadly wrong with the great empire of Rome. Political intrigue and instability were accepted as the price of progress; and war, rebellion, and violence were the common gossip of the marketplace. Superstition was the religion of most, and a serious decay in morality was the inevitable result of such a religion.

It was an age of leisure time. Rome's consistent victories abroad ensured a steady supply of slaves onto the job market. Why work when you could buy others, cheaply, to do it all for you? The politi-

cians, from the emperor down, were always fixing new festival days and, to gain support, frequently put on elaborate shows. By the second century A.D. public festivals could take up 135 days a year! Literature was abundant for those who could read. While Paul was preaching the cross, the empire was reading the *Aeneid* of Virgil, the poetry of Horace, the stories of Ovid, and the dramas of Seneca. The satirist and novelist were in great demand. If reading was not your hobby then the pantomime was always well attended and if you preferred an evening of music, then the theatre and its small sister the odeum regularly presented orchestral and vocal concerts in addition to recitations and plays. Mind you, you would need to see the previews first, since some of the debauched scenes and lustful violence acted on stage might not be to your taste. In fact, it would be difficult to find a play without explicit or implied obscenity.

Corinth was the place to live if you wanted life; it all happened in Corinth. The city boasted a theatre, odeum, and amphitheater. And they all vied with each other to attract your denarii. It was the amphitheater, with its vast arena, that stimulated a sadistic and brutal lust for blood. There, before scores of thousands of spectators, wild animals would fight each other, human gladiators would contest to the death, and victims, often Christians, would be gored to pieces by lions. The crowds loved it; the bloodier, the better. However, you could find a fair degree of realism in the theatre also and, as we saw in an earlier chapter, during the performance of *The Death of Hercules* the hero was actually burnt to death in front of the audience. And it was no accident either!

However, if all this was too much for you to stomach there were plenty of alternatives. People went to the races and laid

their bets. They were exploited by the fair-ground traders, watched the performing animals at the circus, took intense interest in their stars, dabbled in magic, read the current pornography and frequented downtown night clubs. Dance, drama, and music were available in abundance. It was a society of the wealthy and indifferent and the poor and ignorant. Generally everyone lived for the sensual pleasure of the moment.

Behind every way of life there is a way of thinking. So, what was Rome thinking when the first Christians burst into the empire with their gospel of Christ crucified? Wherever the standard of the gospel was raised it found itself in the midst of a society that was following one of three paths, frequently a mixture of each. The Roman Empire could be divided into the pagan, the philosopher, and the Jew; though we must understand that not often were the divisions as neat as this; paganism overlapped with the philosopher, and frequently the Jew was riddled with both.

Paganism covered a multitude of beliefs and practices, from the country animist, who saw his gods in every stone and tree, to the respectable and cultured polytheist, whose scores of gods and hundreds of legends all argued for pride of place. Even the emperors took to proclaiming themselves god. Magic and all forms of occult practices were widespread. Superstitious charms and talismans were popular.

The philosophers loved man's wisdom and assumed that man was capable, either with or without the gods, of discovering the meaning of life and of mastering his own fate. The philosophers of the empire were busy contradicting each other and all have a modern counterpart. The Cynics, inspired by Antisthenes, had abandoned all conventions and traditions and lived a raw kind of individualism; they did their own thing and were not too bothered what others thought. They scandalized the older generation. The followers of Plato were the intellectuals, confident of the salvation assured by their own wisdom and intellec-

tual ability. The Gnostics boasted of their special inner light and understanding, while the Sceptics brought morality and all standards to the final test of personal experience. "If you like it, it's all right," was the motto of the Sceptics. The empire was a confusion of voices and ideas. You could go to the Forum any day, like the Areopagus at Athens, and hear the philosophers airing their wisdom and pooling their ignorance.

The Jews were divided. Of course, most Jews were looking for a Messiah and most believed in the resurrection and the world of the spirits, but the Sadducees rejected all this supernatural as unreasonable nonsense. Most believed in the mercy of God and in forgiveness, but the Pharisees had reduced religion to justification by obedience to their minute interpretations of the law—a strict "do-it-yourself" observance of the rules, their rules. The Jews didn't even agree about the Scriptures. Alongside the Old Testament, the Pharisees studied with great reverence the teachings of their Fathers. On the other hand, the Sadducees accepted only parts of the Old Testament (the Law) as a final authority, and rejected the rest (the Writings and the Prophets) as of little value. Some Jews, like the Essenes, shut themselves away from normal society and others, like the Zealots, represented an extreme nationalistic terrorist group. They were totally opposed to the Sadducees who were generally "hand-in-glove" with the Roman authorities. Judaism in the first century was a complex mixture of tradition and philosophy, conservatism, and liberalism.

How on earth were the early Christians to spread the gospel to such a society?

A popular word today is "communication." Whenever the church is lacking in spiritual power it is unable to convey the gospel in a way that is both relevant and transforming; it cannot "communicate" its message. The response is a frantic search for a new approach, a different method of communicating. Sadly two extremes often emerge. On the one hand, the content of

the message is altered; it is diluted to be more palatable to modern man. As a result, men stand in the pulpit to say something, but they haven't got something to say. Sin and the supernatural, repentance and reconciliation, holiness and hell are either stripped of their meaning or quietly forgotten. On the other hand, and this is the particular tragedy of evangelicalism today, preaching is almost abandoned. It is reduced to a brief epilogue at the close of a glittering spectacle of dance, drama, music, and poetry. Preaching turns into tours, concerts, shows, amplifiers, troupes, strobe lights, and all the dazzling rest. In the brilliance of the performing arts, the gospel is frequently obscured.

In the first century a small, insignificant company of comparatively uneducated men and women reached zealous, well-instructed Jews and intellectual, tradition-steeped pagans with an offensive message about a man recently crucified as a criminal whom they now claimed had risen from the dead! They didn't even speak the languages of their first congregation. Paul admits the whole thing was a stupid impossibility (1 Cor. 1:23). But they did it, and turned the world upside down. The whole course of history was altered.

Communication was not their problem, and it should not be the problem of the church today. It never has been a problem to the church that is spiritually alive and vigorously evangelistic. For all our efforts today, we rarely match the enthusiasm and effectiveness of the first-century church. Our two societies are remarkably similar in mind and heart; only the outward veneer has changed. And our message should not have changed at all, since there is still "no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Somehow *they* seemed to have a better way of communicating Christ, and that way is still available to us. The early Christians evangelized the empire with preaching as their most effective weapon, and they made such an impact on society

that they turned the world upside down. The danger today lies in the threat of the world to turn the church upside down.

The Meaning of "Preaching"

Whenever we mention preaching as central to gospel proclamation there are always those who question whether the word meant *then* what it means *now*. Perhaps, with the passing of nearly two thousand years of church history, the word has taken on a specialized and limited meaning that it was never intended to have when Peter and Paul used the word. After all, there can be little doubt about the meaning of the word in modern conversation. It comes from the Latin *praedico* "to proclaim," and in a religious context it refers to the giving of a sermon or discourse on a religious subject. In general and common use we talk of someone "preaching" when they get on to their pet theme and instruct everyone around with an air of authority! The "preacher" and the "sermon" go together and no one today is in too much doubt about the meaning of the words. But is the word "preaching" found in the New Testament? And if so, what does it mean? This must surely be a vital question for us to answer if we want to know how the first-century Christians spread the gospel.

In fact a number of words are used in the New Testament to describe the activity of declaring the message of salvation. If you really want to know what the disciples of Christ were doing during the thirty years covered in the Book of the Acts then you must stay with me as we take a look at these words. If the early church did more than this it will for ever remain unknown to us, and if they did do more then it was clearly not of sufficient value for the Holy Spirit to pass it on to us for our guidance.

We know that the first-century Christians were *witnesses* (Acts 1:8) and as such could strongly testify of a personal knowledge of what they affirmed. They also *spoke boldly* with an outspoken declaration of the truth (Acts 18:26; 19:8). They

were men of conviction whose object was to *persuade* their hearers to change their mind about Christ (Acts 18:4; 28:23). Paul was more than once called upon to *make a defence* of his faith (Acts 22:1; 25:8; 26:1, 24; Phil. 1:7, 16). Peter encourages Christians always to be ready to do the same (1 Peter 3:15) and our Lord warned us of such occasions (Luke 21:14). This defence, from which our English word “apology” is derived, is a clearing of oneself of false accusations. It is a reasoned exposition of one’s faith. The four words, “to witness” (*martureo*), “speak boldly” (*parasiazomai*), “persuade” (*peitho*), and “defend” (*apologomai*), are used sparingly in the New Testament and tell us more about the manner in which the Christians spoke than the methods they used. There are only three words that are employed extensively, and therefore significantly, in the New Testament to describe the activity of the Christians.

1. To teach—*didasko*

The verb appears almost fifty times in the Gospels to describe the activity of Christ and it is common in Acts also (e.g.: 4:2; 5:21; 18:25; 21:28, etc.). The teacher was a familiar figure in the first century, whether slave or free man, and his duties and abilities, though varied, were well-known. Teaching was by formal instruction and no methods other than the traditional role of the scholar-master relationship were employed. The Jewish rabbi and the Greek philosopher were both teachers and their method was almost always to lecture verbally the students who sat at their feet or on the hard benches provided.

One method of teaching is found in the word *dialegomai*, to discuss (from which we have our word “dialogue”). Normally it involved a formal lecture by the teacher which led into a discussion. Generally it was formal and public but the word could refer to a private and informal “discussion” (which is perhaps a better translation than “argued” in Mark 9:34). *Dialegomai* was a favorite method of teaching

employed by Paul in the Jewish synagogues. In Acts 17:2, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8 it is used in this way evangelistically. In Acts 20:7, 9 it describes Paul’s way of instructing the Christians at Troas (NIV “spoke” and “talked” are not sufficiently clear). In Acts 24:25 Paul lectured the governor Felix, who artfully broke off the engagement before the apostle came to the discussion time!

2. To preach the gospel—*evangelizo*

This word is really the big umbrella for all the activity of the first Christians. Literally the word means “to bring, or announce, good news.” Timothy simply “brought good news” about the Thessalonians to Paul at Corinth (1 Thess. 3:6). Perhaps the best illustration of the use of this word is found in Acts 8:4: “Those who had been scattered preached the Word wherever they went.” The word *preached* is unhelpful in our translations since it presumes to tell us more than the words allow. Some like to interpret it as meaning they went out “gossiping” the gospel, but it doesn’t mean this. That is just a preacher’s wishful thinking! Literally Acts 8:4 says that these Christians, scattered by persecution, “were evangelizing the Word.” This means they were evangelizing *with* the Word. In verse 35 of the same chapter we are told that when Philip met the Ethiopian “he evangelized to him, Jesus.” I know that’s a bit clumsy in English but the point I want to emphasize is that the word *evangelizo* rarely tells us about the *method*; it almost always points to the *content*. So, they evangelized about the Word, or about Jesus. In Ephesians 2:17 Paul tells us that Jesus came “evangelizing peace” and in 3:8 the apostle himself came to evangelize “the unsearchable riches of Christ.” So, back in Acts, they evangelized peace (10:36), the Word (15:35) and Jesus and the resurrection (17:18). In each case the word tells us nothing about the method of communicating the Word, Jesus, peace or the unsearchable riches of Christ. If we substi-

tute the word *announce* for “evangelize” or “preach” in all these verses we have an accurate translation that avoids a confusion we will mention soon. The form of announcing the good news is left an open question. So, how can we determine the method of announcing that was used in the early church? The answer is, we cannot unless the writers of the New Testament introduce another word to explain their actions. Happily they do.

3. To herald—*kerusso*

This is a vital word and we must therefore stay with it a little longer than we did with the previous words.

In Romans 10:15 Paul develops his theme by speaking of those who are “evangelizing a good thing” that is, those who announced good news. But to describe this evangelizing Paul twice uses a highly significant word, in the previous verse and the beginning of this verse: “How can they hear without someone *preaching* to them? And how can they *preach* unless they are sent?” Too frequently our English translations are unhelpful by not distinguishing different words. This word *preach* is not *evangelize*; it is the word *kerusso*, which means “to declare like a herald.” To distinguish it from “evangelize” we will call it, for the time being, “*heralding*.”

In a short while we will look at the fascinating history of this word but you will notice that when Paul wants to tell us how those who have never heard the good news are to be evangelized he says “they herald (preach).” Significantly this is the word Paul uses to describe his work among the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:21; 2:4). However, when Paul was actually in Corinth (Acts 18) neither the words “evangelize” nor “herald” are used. He reasoned (v. 4) and witnessed (v. 5). The expression “Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching” (v. 5 NIV) is a paraphrase of three Greek words that literally mean: “He confined himself to the Word.” Now the *Word* (*logos*) has a variety of meanings and since we are told Paul confined, or limited him-

self to it, it is extremely important for us to know what he was doing, because he obviously didn’t do anything else! Stay with me because our conclusion here has important implications later.

The Greek noun *logos* (word) can refer to a single word, but that is rarely its use in the New Testament. More often it is a statement or even the act of making a statement. That statement or message may be cast in the form of a story, speech, declaration, report, etc., and it may be written but is more normally spoken. Generally the context decides exactly what is meant by *logos*. It is, of course, used of God’s Word revealed to man and is also the title given to Christ in John 1. *Logos* is an active word, and apart from the few occasions when it refers to written Scripture, e.g.: Acts 1:1, literally “My first book (*logos*),” it always refers to a verbal communication; *logos* is the Word in the process of being declared by mouth. You will find this active use of *logos* in Ephesians 1:13: “When you heard the *logos* of truth”; in 1 Timothy 5:17: “the elders who labour in the *logos* and teaching,” and in 1 Thessalonians 2:13. In each case the *logos* is in action being heralded. So Acts 18:5 could be correctly translated: “Paul confined himself to the message.” But what did he do with the message? He reminds the Corinthians that he “heralded” it (1 Cor. 1:21). His “message (*logos*) and heralding (*kerusso*)” (2:4) were one and the same thing. Paul considered that heralding his message was so important that he refused to do anything else. He confined himself to this; it was his one great method. He had no other.

This leads us to examine the word *herald*. It is from this word that our justification for the centrality of preaching has been drawn and there are many who claim that we are proving too much from the word *kerusso*. How can we be sure that when Paul used the word he meant what we mean by preaching? Perhaps he had a more general and altogether more loose definition that could cover a variety of

methods of proclaiming the message.

The noun *kerux*, a herald, has a long and well-documented history which makes our task of tracking down an accurate meaning relatively easy. The noun appears about ninety times in the writings of Homer, a few hundred years B.C. The herald was a man of dignity in the royal court and he held a notable position. As a sign of his regal appointment he carried a sceptre and was a freeman and friend to his master. Surprisingly, for all his exalted position, he acted also as a servant, mixing his master's wine, preparing his bath, serving his guests, even calling for the doctor and, of course, warning of approaching danger. In the post-Homeric period his duties were similar but now he was a servant of the state. He was known as the Herald of the Mysteries, or Herald of the games, festival or marketplace; the Herald of the Areopagus was especially prominent. The herald opened public assemblies in prayer, prayed at the meals and officiated at public sacrifices—he was even given the tongue of the sacrificial animal! As we would expect, he came to town with official notices (rather like the town crier) and, perhaps unexpectedly for us, he was used as the auctioneer at market, often receiving the title of “Salesman”! In Greek mythology special heralds carried the messages of the gods; Hermes, the winged messenger, was just such a herald. In time, all heralds became known as “heralds of the gods.” Ambassadors would often send a herald ahead in a difficult mission because everyone knew that to harm a herald would bring down the anger of the gods. The Stoic philosophers were known as heralds because they revealed divine secrets; they had been sent as messengers of God in order to show men that they had gone astray in matters of good and evil.

There were two basic qualifications for every herald. First, he must have a good voice. It should be clear-toned and sufficiently loud to keep order in the courtroom. If he resorted to a trumpet he was a poor herald! At the Greek festivals the

heralds entered competitions to determine the greatest volume and clearest enunciation. The second qualification was that the herald must be dignified and reliable. Everyone knew that the herald was open to the temptation of self-importance and exaggeration. He must deliver his message accurately. One famous orator of the ancient world declared, “It is necessary that the herald tell the truth when he makes a proclamation to the Greeks in the theatre.” Plato summed up the role of the herald: “The herald receives the thoughts of others as oracles and gives the oracles a second time to others.”

It was worth spending a little time on the history of our word *herald* because this will guide us as we look into the Bible. Judaism does not appear to be familiar with this technical role of the Greek herald, although the couriers sent out in 2 Chronicles 30:6 were clearly heralds. However, the equivalent of the herald's office is undoubtedly seen in the role of the prophets. Isaiah 61:1 is an example of this. The Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament (called the Septuagint and completed by the second century B.C.) uses the verb *kerusso* to translate: “to proclaim freedom for the captives.” Similarly in Joel 1:14; 2:15; 3:9 the verb *kerusso* is employed in the Greek translation. It is similarly used of the preaching of Jonah (Jonah 1:2; 3:2, 4). In all, the verb “to herald” appears some thirty times in the Septuagint and always with the meaning of a public proclamation.

When we turn to the New Testament we are eager to find three words: the herald (*kerux*), the herald's message (*kerugma*) and the act of heralding (*kerusso*). The surprising fact is that, just like in the Old Testament, the first two are barely evident. The noun for herald appears only in 2 Peter 2:5 (referring to the preaching of Noah) and in 1 Timothy 2:7 and 2 Timothy 1:11. We would surely have expected an office of “herald” to appear in the list of 1 Corinthians 12 or Ephesians 4. Why this sparse use? Why

does Paul only twice refer to himself as a herald and nowhere else in the entire New Testament is a Christian preacher called a herald? Perhaps because the term was too well defined already as an office and the apostles were anxious to avoid some of the unhealthy emphases of the herald's office, like the ability to enunciate and speak loudly; hence Paul's reference in 1 Corinthians 2:4: "My message and my heralding were not with wise and persuasive words."

The herald's message (*kerugma*) appears only eight times in the New Testament but it is always the message in action. In 1 Corinthians 2:4 the herald's message is linked with the heralding; the same is true in 2 Timothy 4:17. In Titus 1:3 the message must be seen in action (hence NIV "preaching"). Thus 1 Corinthians 1:21 "the foolishness of what was preached" really refers to the message in the act of being heralded. A fair paraphrase would be "the foolishness of the preached message."

However, it is the verb *kerusso* that is most frequently found in the New Testament. Twenty times it is used of Jesus and five times by Him. Of all His work during His ministry on earth this was His most important. In Mark 1:38 our Lord is anxious to move away from the crowds who only want more miracles, so that He can preach in other villages: "That is why I have come." In Luke 4:18 He deliberately identified Himself with the herald of Isaiah 61:1.

In the Acts the word is used nine times and Paul uses it in all but three of his epistles. We are back where we started! When Paul speaks of the commission to herald the gospel, in Romans 10:15, he is using a word rich with significance. New Testament preaching had only one meaning and Paul was committed to it. He was a man under a divine obligation (1 Cor. 9:17); he was a messenger of God. This is why Paul confined himself to heralding his message at Corinth (Acts 18:5; 1 Cor. 1:21). He knew of no other way half so effective and,

anyway, he had no other mandate. Twice Paul refers to his ministry as a "herald, apostle, and teacher" in that order (1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11). He was a herald of God, the sovereign, almighty God, and that gave authority and dignity to his office. Paul would not stoop to anything less. Nor did the first-century Christians want their preachers to do so. They believed in the foolishness of powerful preaching and wanted no alternatives or additives. Robert Mounce emphasizes the urgency of the preacher: "Preaching is not a relaxed recital of interesting, but morally neutral events." It was always powerful, demanding and urgent. This is why almost all the preaching in Acts issued either in revival or riot, conversion or contention.

There can be no doubt that preaching has the powerful backing of the New Testament as the method of evangelism to which the apostles and the early church were entirely committed. Robert Mounce is correct when he insists, "No longer can we consider preaching to be just another medium for the communication of Christian doctrine. Nor can we any longer discuss it according to the general laws which govern all propaganda alike." Preaching is God in action: it is His chosen method and therefore that which He will honor more than any other.

When the herald spoke, he did so with royal authority. The herald preacher is not engaged in a cozy chat with a group of intimate friends, and his message is never to be trimmed to fit in with the prevailing breeze of contemporary opinion. The sermon is not so much an attractive signpost to the cross as a thundering command to go there; it is not so much a comfortable discourse about God as the voice of God breaking in to man. It is not claiming too much to say that preaching is part of God's act of redemption; it is the way, not the only way, but certainly the chief way, that God communicates salvation to the soul of man. The sermon is God's vehicle for grace. The early Christians knew this, and they knew of nothing better. Nothing

was so effective, so demanding or so immediate. The sermon confronts men and women where they are and the preacher reacts and interreacts to a living congregation. Everything else, be it dance, drama or any of the contemporary arts, can never be so immediate, so flexible or so powerful as the sermon preached “with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power” (1 Cor. 2:4). Rarely did Paul request prayer from his readers, but when he did he knew exactly what he needed. Never did he encourage the Christians to pray for converts; he went for the bigger thing: prayer for the preaching. Look at Ephesians 6:19: “Pray . . . for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me . . .” and Colossians 4:3: “Pray for us . . . that God may open a door for our message (*logos*), so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ,” and 2 Thessalonians 3:1: “Pray for us, that the message (*logos*) of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honoured.” Paul knew, and all the first-century Christians knew, that the most effective way to pray for the conversion of sinners was to pray for the preaching of the message. Evangelistic prayer began with the sermon.

We claimed earlier that communication is not, and never has been, the church’s problem. A weak and powerless church thinks that is its problem and stoops to all kinds of methods to overcome this felt need. Communication is not the church’s problem, because communicating the gospel is a theological and not a cultural problem. Therefore communication is God’s problem, not ours! Robert Mounce puts it so crudely and plainly: “God speaks, but man stuffs his fingers into his ears.” Paul puts it more theologically: “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:4). How can man rescue man from such spiritual blindness? Shall we dance? Or shall we follow God’s revealed pattern—and preach?

Unfortunately we live in the day of the

downgrade of preaching. There are many reasons for this. Partly it is due to the fact that the precisely dull preaching in many of our churches has turned off the long-suffering contemporary congregation. Sam Keen in his book *To a Dancing God* unfortunately speaks for many when he claims, “There is a time for words. It has lasted from the Reformation to the present. Now we are sick of being inundated in an ocean of verbiage.” What a tragic confession! Something must have gone disastrously wrong if our modern New Testament heralds are merely inundating us with “an ocean of verbiage.” The consequence of this is that the church today has lost confidence in its God-given mandate. In some quarters the sermon is supplemented by the arts; in others the arts are supplemented by the sermon, and in some the sermon is abandoned altogether. Yet the biblical mandate for preaching does not make the sermon an option or an alternative; on the contrary, it is essential to the health, even the existence, of the church.

René Padilla has not overstated the case when he claims, “Preaching continues to be as unavoidable to the church as burning is to fire. If the church ever ceased to preach she would cease to be the church.” This is something we must take seriously. Lip-service to the importance of preaching is not enough; it must be seen to be central to our evangelism. And if our contemporary preaching is nothing better than “an ocean of verbiage” the solution is not to abandon the sermon, but to pray urgently for better preachers. When the church has been in a healthy state preaching has always been both the cause and the result. This whole subject is not a matter of personal opinion, church tradition or blind dogma. We are talking about the essence of the church, what is essential to its life and health. Padilla is quite right: “If the church ever ceased to preach she would cease to be the church.” ■

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The Infiltration of Narcissism

by Herbert W. Bateman IV

First, our self-engrossed culture has infiltrated the marketing of worship. One particularly alarmed author, Marva Dawn, contends that many contemporary worship services “dumb faith down” to attract the self-absorbed. “Perhaps the most dangerous of the subtle influences on contemporary worship practices,” says Dawn, “is the self-centered bent of the modern world”—caused by society streams (i.e., technology, boomer, and postmodern culture) and idolatries (i.e., money, traditionalism, celebrities, numbers and success, power, etc.). From Dawn’s perspective, the self-centered bent of the world has infiltrated many of our evangelical communities. Much of Dawn’s concern is directed at the market-driven or commodity-like contemporary worship services and the recent preoccupation to turn worship services into evangelistic growth services.

C. S. Lewis expresses a similar concern. While commenting on what appeared to him as a *preoccupation* with applying novel techniques to lure people into the church, Lewis says, “ ’Tis mad idolatry that makes the service greater than the god.” Neither Dawn nor Lewis is suggesting, however, that we refrain from developing ways to enhance our worship of God. The problem is on *preoccupation* with a service to lure people into the church and the various methods employed that “dumb down” the church due to the self-centered bent of society rather than the focus on God, the one whom we have been called to worship.

Although Dawn, like Lewis, tends to favor a liturgical form of worship, she speaks directly against the infiltration of narcissism in marketing worship for the self-centered masses because it misses the point of worship. Authentic worship for Dawn must involve *encountering the subject*, namely, God in worship; it must

involve *forming Christian character*; and it must involve *building Christian community*. Whether we agree entirely with Dawn’s definition of authentic worship, her overall concern is worth reflection. “When we allow our society to force us to ‘dumb down’ the Church, we kill theological training, inhibit the forming of character, prevent appreciation for the rich gifts of the Church’s past. Most of all we miss the infinitely faceted grandeur of God and destroy the awe and wonder that characterized worship before God became only a ‘buddy’ ill-conceived and only subjectively experienced.” Thus, our narcissistic manner of marketing worship as well as our egalitarian tendencies have reduced God, the Infinite-Creator-Redeemer God, to be our buddy.

Another concerned author, Sally Morgenthaler, muses, “We are not producing worshipers in this country. Rather, we are producing a generation of spectators, religious onlookers lacking, in many cases, any memory of a true encounter with God, deprived of both the tangible sense of God’s presence and the supernatural relationship their inmost spirits crave.” Granted, Morgenthaler addresses worship issues very differently from Dawn. Morgenthaler wants pastors to reexamine, rethink, and reform worship services that involve participation of both believer and nonbeliever alike in worship. Nevertheless, both women recognize the infiltration and narcissistic bent of today’s evangelical worshiper. Looking at the narcissistic issue from Morgenthaler’s perspective, “The sad truth is we born-again Christians [evangelicals] are an essentially insulated, narcissistic subculture, involving ourselves with very few people outside our own churches.”

Has North America’s self-engrossed, narcissistic way of life infiltrated and stolen

the crown jewel from the evangelical church we attend or lead? Regardless of whether we attend or lead a liturgical, traditional, contemporary, neocontemporary, or blended worship service, is my church market-commodity driven? When we go to our place of worship, are our thoughts and attitudes *pre-occupied* with the form of worship, the style of music, or the preaching of Scripture to lure in people? Am I preoccupied with appeasing builder, boomer, or busters' likes and dislikes? These questions are not to minimize or deemphasize helping individuals to have a personal encounter with God in a community gathering for worship. In his book *Worship Is a Verb*, Webber rightly recognizes that "worship calls for the involvement of our mind, body, and soul. Worship demands nothing less than the complete, conscious, and deliberate participation of the worshiper." As worship leaders, we need to create ways for the worshiper to participate in worship so that corporately we all engage and experience God.

In summary, authentic worship is not a commodity; it is not a preoccupation with luring people into our service; and it is not a preoccupation with satisfying or appeasing generational likes and dislikes. Authentic worship is first and foremost about God. So, as a pastor who wants to help individuals have a personal encounter with God, what should be my concern? To begin with, we need to know what a worshiper is. In other words, what does a worshiper involved in authentic worship look like? In Chapter 2 of this book, "The Worshiper's Approach to God," Ronald Manahan, president of Grace College and Seminary, focuses our attention on a biblical portrayal from Psalm 15 of a worshiper who wishes to approach God in authentic worship. It confronts the thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors of a person who desires to enter into the presence of God.

Second, our self-engrossed culture also affects our approach to Scripture. Attempts to see ourselves in all of Scripture not only infects the way we study the Bible at home and teach the Bible in Sun-

day school, but more harmfully it infects the way the Bible is preached during worship. Walt Russell rightly recognizes that "many of us [pastors are obviously included] view the world in narcissistically wounded categories that assume every passage in the Bible is about us. Fortunately," Russell continues, "God has a grand plan that He is revealing in the Bible that encompasses insight into ourselves but that plan doesn't rotate around that knowledge. Indeed, *most passages in the Bible are about things other than us!*"

Evidence of Russell's observation exists in Blount's book, *What Jesus Taught About Praise and Worship*. Though a sensitive, well intentioned, and gifted contemporary Christian artist, Ken Blount erroneously draws reasons from James 1:22-25 for seeing *ourselves* in all of Scripture. "We look into God's Word," he emphasizes, "*to see who we are and what Jesus has done for us . . . to see what we need to correct.*" Blount obviously loves God and uses the Bible regularly to see him through difficult life situations. Nevertheless, his understanding of Scripture results in frequent misinterpretations and misapplications, two of which I will cite. First, "When we are asking God for something in line with His Word," (e.g., based upon the jot and tittle of Matthew 5:18) Blount contends, "the smallest details [of our prayers] must come to pass in our lives." Unfortunately, the passage has nothing to do with prayer or a believer's prayer life. Jesus' deliberate use of overstatement (hyperbole) in Matthew 5:18 declares that the law will be fully preserved as Jesus presents, interprets, and teaches it.

Second, "When a believer is filled with the Spirit," according to Blount's application of Ephesians 5:18, "he can get real answers to the challenges he faces [in life], because he is in communion and fellowship with God." Within its context, however, Ephesians 5:18 *instructs* believers to live wisely, which involves yielding to the Holy Spirit. This in turn impacts our inner being in such a way that it affects how we

relate with one another (v. 19). Ephesians 5:18 has absolutely nothing to do with getting answers to life.

Blount, however, is not alone in his misuse of Scripture. We all have wrongly used and abused Scripture because we have viewed it as a book about *me*, especially during tough times of life. *But the Bible is not about me.*

The realization that our narcissistic cultural orientation infects many who read, study, and teach Scripture alarms me because more and more well-intentioned students, in their genuine desire to enter teaching/preaching ministries as quickly as possible, shortcut their educational foundation. Their awareness of and knowledgeable use of equipment necessary for biblically informed learning is missing from their toolboxes for ministry. Students forge ahead in master degree programs that merely survey Jewish history, literature, and culture; minimize and possibly ignore study in biblical Hebrew, Greek, and literary genres; and shortcut theological and intercultural study. Thus, they are not licensed builders, skilled technicians, and masters of their trade but self-taught handymen and women, who are more apt to violate codes of interpretation and thereby read, study, teach, and preach Scripture as though it is mainly about the student.

Russell points to several passages that have been preached from a culturally self-engrossed perspective, rather than from a biblically informed perspective (Deut. 28:2-14; Judges 6:36-40; Matt. 16:24, 25; 18:19, 20). He rightly recognizes that God's intended truth has been delivered by various human authors through various literary packaging of God's truth, and he addresses carefully how to approach each genre in Scripture for the spiritual formation of the believer. For instance, his third point about gospel study is quite simply that "the Focus of the Gospel is on Jesus, not us!" Russell continues to build his case when he muses,

It is almost embarrassing to have to

make this statement, but it is absolutely necessary. Why? Because the increasing tendency in our reading of the Gospels is to reduce them primarily to sources of insight about ourselves. For example, we read about Jesus calming a storm on the Sea of Galilee, and we think it is about the storms of our lives. Or read about Jesus being rejected by His friends and family in the Nazareth synagogue (Luke 4:16-30), and we think it is primarily about our possible rejection by those around us when we take a stand for Christ. Or we read in John 6:1-15 about Jesus miraculously feeding the five thousand in the wilderness with the boy's five barley loaves and two fishes, and we think it is about what we should be giving to Jesus! You get the idea.

While this tendency is both a problem of our worldview glasses and a symptom of our narcissistic woundedness, its impact is still tragically the same: We end up knowing more about ourselves and less about Jesus. We become theologically impoverished in our knowledge about the only One who can really transform us! We become ignorant of our Master, whom we should be seeking to please with all our being.

Perhaps a word of balance should be appropriate here. When I say that the Gospels are about Jesus, this does not mean they do not give us any insight into ourselves or have significance and application to our lives. Of course they do. However, the Gospels were primarily written to tell us about who Jesus is, what He did, and why He is the only, true object of our faith. If we change this focus, we destroy the very essence of the Gospels. By making the Gospels more about ourselves, we ironically lessen their transforming impact on our lives, because the more we learn about Jesus Christ, the more we will entrust ourselves to Him as His disciples.

Russell's point is simply this: many evangelical Christians approach Scripture with self-absorbed thoughts and attitudes. As a result, Scripture reading and preaching with North American cultural self-fixations yield *me*-oriented religious expectations, namely, subjective interpre-

tations that are then wrongly applied. *Me*-oriented fixations of interpretation are not to shape God's truth.

In my mind, preaching that causes people to focus attention on *my* needs, *my* desires, *my* troubles, and *my* wants when the text says something else reflects the infectious wounds of our narcissistic culture. It prevents the worshiper from learning to know Christ, living for Christ, and leading others to be disciples of Christ. As Webber has come to realize, "worship is a celebration of the Christ-event, His life, death, and resurrection . . . a celebration that puts me in touch with the *truth that shapes my whole life*, and I have found it to be *a necessary element for my own spiritual formation.*" Thus, if the God and Christ of Scripture is not preached, it cripples the worshiper's ability from having a true spiritual encounter with God because what we know about God affects how we worship and how we live for Him. God wants worshipers who will worship Him in spirit and truth (John 4:24).

In Chapters 3 and 4 of this work, Richard Averbeck, associate professor of Old Testament and Semitic languages at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, presents a biblical theology of worship. His chapters provide a theological basis to help shift the evangelical worship service from a narcissistic-driven service to one driven by "Worshipping God in Spirit" and "Worshipping God in Truth." Although many books on worship talk about worshipping God "in spirit and truth," few tell us what that means biblically. Averbeck, however, demonstrates that authentic worship involves a divine/human dynamic, a spiritual exchange between God and His people, which is based upon truth in spirit, truth in action, and truth in word. Authentic worship "in spirit and truth" enables today's worshipers to know, engage, and experience God. Church communities that focus their attention on worshipping God "in spirit and truth" will not only know and experience God during a worship hour, but such attention will

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impact the spiritual formation of Christ Jesus' disciples in everyday life.

In conclusion, our cultural orientation tends to be *I* or *me* driven. Like our culture, many evangelicals are screaming, "Gimme! Gimme! Gimme! I need! I need! I need!" In many cases, the cries have caused (1) the infiltration of narcissism to market worship to the masses at God's expense and (2) the infection of narcissism in the self-fixatious preaching of Scripture at the worshiper's expense of knowing and engaging God. As a result, these two narcissistic preoccupations prevent today's evangelical church from repositioning its crown jewel.

Authentic worship is not about satisfying *specific generational likes* and fixations on individualized wants. Authentic worship is about finite beings entering into the presence of the Infinite, it is about created beings encountering their Creator-Redeemer, and it is about a *corporate community* of professing believers who participate in expressing their feelings and celebrating the triune God in both Spirit/spirit and truth regularly. Morgenthaler says it this way: "Real [authentic] worship is a lot more than this week's production. It is where we allow the supernatural God of Scripture to show up and to interact with people in the pews." ■

—Taken from *A Call for Authentic Worship* by Herbert W. Bateman IV. Published by Kregel Publications. Used by permission of the publisher.

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NEWSLINES . . . cont'd.

African Christianity is growing faster than it ever has. There are 390 million Christians in Africa now, an increase of 4,400 percent since 1900. Prognosticators predict 600 million Christians in African churches by 2025. As we have all heard, churches are emptying in Europe. Even though there are officially 531 million Christians still in Europe (including Russia), making them the largest single block at present, only 10 percent attend church regularly. —from *Mennonite Weekly Review*

SWORD AND TRUMPET

Worship Involves Warfare

*In which we recover a neglected fact about Satan
and learn about spiritual warfare*

by Warren Wiersbe

God and Satan have this in common: each desires our worship. God wants us to worship Him because He is worthy and He graciously wants to transform us. Satan wants our worship because he wants to destroy us, and worship is the easiest way to achieve that diabolical purpose. This explains why worship involves warfare: whenever we bow to worship God, the Adversary will oppose us.

God's Rival

The Bible doesn't shed much light on the origin of Satan. Many scholars believe that Isaiah 14:12-15 goes beyond the immediate reference to the king of Babylon and applies to Satan. If so, then a desire for worship (which is basically pride) was the sin that brought about Lucifer's fall. "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High" (Isa. 14:14). Apparently a number of angelic creatures were willing to worship Lucifer, and fell with him. This satanic army opposes God and His people and can only be defeated by God-given spiritual means.

When Satan tempted our first parents, his appeal was centered on worship. His approach was to question God's Word ("Has God indeed said . . ."—Gen. 3:1), deny God's Word ("You will not surely die"—v. 4), and then substitute His own promise ("You will be like God"—v. 5). He still uses this strategy today.

There's no missing the parallel between Lucifer's "I will be like the Most High" and the deceptive promise "You will be like God." When Adam and Eve partook of the fruit, they "exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Rom. 1:25).

Satan received the worship that he was seeking, and he is still receiving it whenever people substitute the creature for the Creator and believe the lie that they can be their own god. Actually, this ancient lie is the basis for the New Age movement today.

We noted at the beginning of this pilgrimage that humility is important to true spiritual worship. Pride is the essential ingredient when it comes to worshipping Satan. Lucifer's repeated "I will" (Isa. 14:12-15) is evidence enough of his pride and is in contrast to our Lord's repeated statement in the garden, "Nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will" (Mark 14:36). And the fall of Lucifer must be contrasted with our Lord's deliberate self-humbling described in Philippians 2:1-11. Lucifer exalted himself and was humiliated; Christ humbled Himself and was highly exalted.

"So far as . . . worship [of Christ] is genuine and complete, pride is eliminated," wrote William Temple; "for He whom we worship is humility itself incarnate."

It is this truth that helps us better understand the worship experiences of Cain and Abel (Gen. 4). Both brothers believed in God and both came to the altar to worship, but God accepted only Abel's worship. Satan is a liar and a murderer (John 8:44) and so was Cain: he murdered his own brother and then lied about it to God (Gen. 4:1-15). First John 3:12 informs us that Cain "was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous." "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright is his delight" (Prov. 15:8).

The character of our worship depends on the condition of our heart, for "without

faith it is impossible to please him” (Heb. 11:6). It was Abel’s faith that made his worship acceptable to God (v. 4). In humility, he accepted what God had said, believed it, and acted upon it. He brought to the altar a humble sacrifice of faith, and God bore witness that he had been accepted.

Throughout the Old Testament, there is a clear record of the contrasting lines of Cain and Abel, unbelief and faith, Satan and God. Satan’s religion is the religion of substitutes: worship anyone or anything but the true God. He enticed Israel to worship the idols of the pagan nations that they conquered. Paul makes it clear that idol worship is actually demonic and is really Satan worship (1 Cor. 10:14-22). So much for comparative religions.

When Satan tempted our Lord in the wilderness, he offered Him all the kingdoms of the world in return for one act of worship. “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me” (Matt. 4:9), and the verb tense indicates a single act of worship.

Satan pays for worship. This explains why he slandered Job, saying that Job served God only because God blessed him. Christians worship the Lord, not because He pays us but because He is worthy of worship. Like the three Hebrew men in Daniel 3, true Christians won’t bow down to Satan even if the Lord doesn’t deliver them from death. They echo Job’s confession, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15).

Satan didn’t ask our Lord for *service*; but Satan certainly knew that whatever people worship, they serve. That explains our Lord’s reply, “You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve” (Matt. 4:10; see also Deut. 6:13; 10:20).

One day Satan will make that same offer to another individual, and it will be accepted. That person will become the world leader that the Scriptures call “the man of sin . . . the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is

called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (2 Thess. 2:3, 4). According to Revelation 13, this “man of sin” will cause the whole world to worship Satan, except, of course, those who belong to Christ and are sealed by Him.

The fact that Satan has always wanted worship helps us to understand his hatred for Israel, God’s chosen people who have given witness to the true and living God. It also explains Satan’s hatred for the church, the believing saints “who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3). Our spiritual worship of God hinders Satan’s work, defeats his plans, robs him of territory, and increases his hatred of God and God’s people. So long as any local church doesn’t worship God in the Spirit, Satan is happy to let them do anything they want to do; for he knows that all of our man-made programs, no matter how seemingly successful, can never storm the gates of hell and defeat his demonic armies.

God’s Worshiping Warriors

A worshiping church must of necessity be a warring church, for true worship is spiritual warfare. The best example of this truth is seen in the nation of Israel. From the hour that Israel was delivered by God from the bondage of Egypt, the nation was constituted a holy army for the Lord. “So it came to pass, on that very same day, that the LORD brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt according to their armies” (Exodus 12:51). The nation’s song of triumph at the Red Sea announced without apology, “The LORD is a man of war; the LORD is his name” (15:3). Whenever the camp of Israel moved, the procession was like that of a well-organized army, with the ark of God leading the way and Moses saying, “Rise up, O LORD! Let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee before You” (Num. 10:35).

In short, Israel was a worshiping army, fighting the battles of the Lord. The suc-

cess of their warfare depended on the success of their worship. If they were right with God, they had no difficulty defeating their enemies. If they were not pleasing to God, they were shamefully defeated. It was as simple as that. It was then that Israel lamented, "You do not go out with our armies!" (Psalm 44:9).

When the nation took a census, it was based on how many men were available for battle, "all who are able to go to war in Israel" (Num. 1:3). To lose a battle meant much more than causing national disgrace; it robbed Jehovah of the glory due to His name. After all, He is "the LORD of hosts," the Lord of the armies of heaven and earth.

The center of the camp was especially dedicated to the Lord, because that's where the tabernacle stood. Faithful ministry in the tabernacle was essential for victory on the battlefield. Israel's shameful defeat before the Philistines was caused partly by the unfaithfulness of the priests (1 Sam. 4). Even though the priests carried the ark of God out to the battlefield, God didn't honor them with victory. What they did was not an act of faith; it was only superstition.

It is interesting to note that a group of women "assembled at the door of the tabernacle of meeting" (Exodus 38:8). The Hebrew word translated "assembled" has a definite military flavor to it. Literally it means "assembled by troops at the door of the tabernacle of meeting." In 2 Kings 25:19 and Jeremiah 52:25, the word refers to the mustering of troops.

But even more interesting is the fact that this same word is used of the ministry of the priests and Levites in the tabernacle. "To perform the service" in Numbers 4:23 and 8:24 literally means "to war the warfare." The spiritual battle was fought at the tabernacle; the physical battle was waged on the battlefield.

Soon after Israel's exodus from Egypt, the people learned firsthand the importance of winning victories for the Lord. The Amalekites attacked Israel, but God

gave the nation victory because Moses, holding the rod of God, stood on the mountain and interceded with God (Exodus 17:8-16). It took both Joshua with his sword and Moses with his uplifted rod to defeat the enemy.

The army metaphor permeates the Book of Psalms. Psalm 1 magnifies the God of blessing, while Psalm 2 extols the God of battles. The two go together. It is because Israel obeyed the law that God gave the people victory over their enemies. Psalm 68 is one of the most militant of the Psalms, describing God's conquest of His enemies. "Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered; let those also who hate Him flee before Him" (v. 1). "You have ascended on high. You have led captivity captive" (v. 18). In the New Testament, the church borrowed these psalms and applied them to the victories of Christ.

David's praise in Psalm 144 certainly would perplex a pacifist! He actually blesses God for training his hands for war! In verse 9, he lays aside his sword and picks up his harp; the soldier becomes the singer. Again, it is the blending of worship and warfare. "Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand" (Psalm 149:6). Worshiping warriors!

Perhaps the most dramatic illustration of worship and warfare is seen in Jehoshaphat's confrontation with the Moabites and the Ammonites, as recorded in 2 Chronicles 20. The first step the king took was to call a fast and gather the people together for prayer. In that prayer, Jehoshaphat reminded the Lord of His promises and His past performances on behalf of the people of Israel. The result was a Spirit-given message from the priest Jahaziel that God would give them the victory.

The next day, the king assembled the people for battle, but he did a strange thing: he put the singers ahead of the soldiers! "And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed those who should sing to the LORD, and who should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army

and were saying: 'Praise the LORD, for His mercy endures forever' " (v. 21).

The result? God caused the invading armies to defeat each other! Jehoshaphat and his people didn't even need to fight. They simply claimed the spoils and returned to Jerusalem for a great praise service at the temple.

During Jeremiah's day, the people were sure God would protect them from Babylon because the temple of the Lord was in Jerusalem. They believed that He would never permit His house to be destroyed. The temple services were going on as usual and the false prophets were announcing peace and security, but Jeremiah knew that the worship at the temple was hypocritical and superstitious. "Do not trust in these lying words, saying, 'The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD are these' " (Jer. 7:4). "Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit" (v. 8). Then Jeremiah gave them God's perspective on the matter. "Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes?" (v. 11).

The frightening thing is that, to all appearances, this was a time of great religious revival. The temple had been repaired, the God-given ceremonies had been restored, and the people were rejoicing in these blessings. Jeremiah's message of repentance and judgment sounded out of place against the joyful sounds of the temple choirs and the encouraging messages of the prophets.

Yes, the popularity of "national religion" was at an all-time high, but the people's worship wasn't coming from their hearts. They broke God's law and then went to the temple to seek God's blessing! They made the temple a "den of thieves"—the place where thieves run when they want to hide! The prophets, priests, and people were using public religion as a cover-up for their private sins.

The nation fell to the Babylonians. The temple was desecrated and then destroyed. Why? Because true worship had disap-

peared from the land. Religion was popular, but it was not penetrating. It was a veneer that covered the rotting foundations of the nation. The people fooled each other, but they couldn't fool God or His true servant, Jeremiah.

The sad thing is that the prophets were also to blame. In his Lamentations, Jeremiah wrote: "Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; they have not uncovered your iniquity, to bring back your captives, but have envisioned for you false prophecies and delusions" (2:14). Disaster had come upon Jerusalem "because of the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, who shed in her midst the blood of the just" (4:13).

This is a sobering message to us today.

Lord of Hosts,

Your Son has won for us that decisive victory over Satan and all his hosts. He has "disarmed principalities and powers."

Hallelujah!

I realize now, O Lord, that there is a militant side to worship. You are calling me to have Your praises on my lips and Your sword in my hand. The enemy is subtle and strong, and I cannot win the battle in my own strength.

Help me to remember that my battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers of darkness and the hosts of spiritual wickedness. May I not depend on the arm of flesh. The weapons of this warfare are not fleshly, but spiritual.

O Lord, help Your church to be a conquering army! May we not trust the externals—our budgets, our buildings, our impressive statistics. May we trust You and have clean hands and pure hearts so that You might fight our battles with us. And remind us that we are not fighting flesh and blood; we are fighting spiritual wickedness.

Lord, give us unity. May we fight the enemy and not each other. Help us to be more than conquerors through Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen. ■

—Taken from *Real Worship* by Warren N. Wiersbe, 2nd Ed. © 2000 Baker Books.



Sing the New Song



by John D. Martin
Shippensburg, PA

From a message preached at Charity Christian Fellowship

Every time I sing, I think these thoughts: This is the only activity in the typical church service that we're still going to be doing in eternity. Someday the preaching will all be over. Someday the praying will all be over. Now we'll still be fellowshiping and worshiping, and that might include more than singing, but of the activities that we're used to in a typical congregational experience, this is the one we're going to do through all eternity. And so, we want to get it right while we're here.

Turn in your hymnal (*the hymnal used is The Christian Hymnary*) to "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah." This has long been high on the favorite list of our family. If you'll look at the date on that song, it takes us back about 200 years, to the country of Wales. I don't know how much you know about what happened there, but if you would have gone out early in the morning, every morning—this went on for years—you would see miners walking to work, and women walking to work, and they would be singing this song. If you were at a public meeting, the public meeting probably would not be closed until this song was sung. It practically became the national anthem of Wales, and was written by a man by the name of William Williams. Now we don't hear that much about him, but he was very notable in his own country, at least as much in Wales as John Wesley was in England! He traveled about 95,000 miles by horse, and he was a little different from Wesley—he was a great singer. He was known as the "sweet singer of Wales" and wrote about 900 songs, all of them in Welsh. The interesting thing about that revival

was he basically promoted it as a revival that was motivated and inspired by singing! Very little preaching was done in that revival. Often, if there was preaching done, in the middle of the sermon someone would burst into song, and they'd spend the rest of the evening singing! It was a singing revival, and the Spirit of God came down upon the country of Wales and changed the country—for almost a century it was not the same. Williams had a forty-year ministry, and he was an extremely influential person, but the power of his ministry was mostly the power of song, and the songs that he wrote. And so, this is indeed a very important subject.

Now I would like you to turn back 2,500 years. Let's go back to 2 Chronicles 20. Here we have a story that tells us about the tremendous power of song. I'm going to state up front my personal belief, and that is that

Music Brings Us Right Up Into the Supernatural

The minute we start singing, we are on the verge of the supernatural world, be it the right world or the wrong one! That's why I think music is so terribly important, because when people are singing, they are starting to commune with spirits—either the Holy Spirit, and all the power that it represents, or the wrong kind of spirits, and all the power that they represent. You will recall that the nation of Judah was in terrible trouble. Jehoshaphat was their king, and the Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites had come up against them—these were formidable enemies that the Israelites had not destroyed. God would not let the Israelites destroy these

nations. Because of Israel's weakness, Judah would be attacked by these groups in times of weakness. Jehoshaphat got an army together, including the Syrians, the Israelites, and the people of Judah, and he proclaimed a fast. He stood up in the congregation as we read in verse 6 and said:

"O Lord God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen, and in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee" and then he reminded God of His promise, that if they ever got into trouble, and they came and prayed in His sanctuary, that he would hear, and this is what he prayed: *"Art not thou, our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land for thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham Thy friend forever? And they dwelt therein, and have built Thee a sanctuary therein for Thy name, saying when evil cometh upon us, as the word, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house, and in thy presence, (for thy name is in this house,) and cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help.*

Verse 12: *"O our God, wilt thou not judge them? For we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee."* And then Jahaziel, one of the sons of Asaph, who was a singer, and a Levite, stood up and said, *"Don't you be dismayed about this great multitude. The battle is not yours, it's the Lord's and you shall not need to fight in this battle."* Verse 17: *"Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the Lord will be with you."* And they all worshiped. Now, let me define the word *worship*. Worship is not getting together

and making a lot of exciting noises. Worship is not something we do primarily on Sunday mornings. Worship is not even something primarily we do when we're singing. The word *worship* comes from the Old English word *worthship*. We only worship whenever by our entire life we demonstrate that God is worth more to us than anything else! And then if we come together and our singing is part and parcel of what we have demonstrated by word and deed throughout the week, then we worship! But if this is disconnected from what you were doing over the past six days, then you were not worshiping this morning! We only worship when we have demonstrated that God is the highest thing on our list of priorities. You worship all week, and you do it here when you sing. So these people worshiped, and then the Levites stood up to praise the Lord with a loud voice. Are you aware that there were four thousand paid musicians in Israel? It was a paid position. Four thousand people were paid to full-time worship the Lord in song. That's how important it was to God. Out of those four thousand people (you can read this in 1 Chronicles 23:5 and 1 Chronicles 25:1 and 7), 288 of them were especially trained to go out and teach all of the people of the land to sing. This gives us some idea of how important music is to God! I imagine that when the Levites sang that it became very evident that the most powerful thing they could do the next morning was to sing! And so the next morning, Joshua was still so inspired by those Levites and their singing that he put those singers right in front of the army and they marched into battle singing. And the Lord sent ambushments against Moab, Edom, and Ammon. They got confused, and they started killing each other until they were all dead! That must have been an amazing sight for these people to stand there and watch this battle being won

without having to lift a sword! And on they go with their song! I think it got louder and louder! All the people had to do was gather up the spoil! It took them three days, and it tells you that they couldn't even carry it all!

This was indeed an amazing experience—I wish I could have been there! But, brothers and sisters, we've been there. I don't know what you do when the battle is hard, I don't know what you do when you're sorely tempted, I don't know what you do when you're opposed, and bitterly accused, and the devil's right there with discouragement. I'll tell you what I do: I sing. And you'll see the same thing happen. You'll see ambushments, and you'll see the enemy defeat its own self and leave the field. **Singing is a powerful weapon!** It is a tremendous resource that God has given every one of us, and I think this is why it is such a tragedy if there's somebody who cannot sing, or if he can, he will not sing! There's nothing we have at our disposal that is more strategically powerful than song. I remember when John Risser, a godly bishop who used to preach in our community frequently, stood in one of our pulpits, and very sadly said, "Beware of the person who has no song." Now he didn't mean a person that could not sing beautifully, but a person that doesn't have that song of praise welling up (even if they cannot sing in tune) out of their hearts, in every situation of life.

I chose that story to introduce the idea that in worship, and in songs of worship, there is supernatural power! I want to convince you that the most powerful thing you can do, through the next week, and through your entire life is to sing, in true worship—whether it's the revival in Wales, or it's this deliverance we just read about in Israel, we find that there is supernatural power in true songs of worship, especially in difficult situations. Remember Paul and Silas in the prison at Philippi—how

they were thrust into the inner part of the prison, and into those stocks with their backs bleeding. They began to sing, and the foundations of the prison shook! And all the doors were opened, but there was something more amazing that happened that day than that! Not one prisoner got up and left. Have you ever noticed that? Note that when the jailer came, and was scared to death for his own life, Paul says, "We're all here!" To me that's the most amazing miracle—you have a prison with all the gates open, and everyone's chains loose, and everyone just sits there! Paul and Silas' song had that whole situation, even the human element, under complete control. I told you, there's supernatural power in song!

Nehemiah 8:10 says, "*The joy of the Lord is your strength.*" Psalm 22:3 says, "*O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.*" Song puts you right on the edge of the spiritual world, and when you start to sing, Christ comes right into your song, and He's there. Are you ever in a situation in life in which you don't feel as if God's presence is very real? It's never failed for me—singing makes God's presence very real in my life. My mother was one of the most cheerful people I have ever met in my life, and she was one of the most victorious people that I knew in my life. And I think I know why—she spent almost all her time singing. I know most of the hymns in our hymnal by heart because she sang them, and that's where I learned them. She knew them by heart. It was a tremendous experience to grow up with a mother who spent all her time singing. No wonder she was so happy! Everybody in the family will tell you that my mother was one of the most joyful and cheerful persons that our family ever knew. She had her down times, but by and large, she was a happy person, and I think it had to do with the fact that she spent a lot of her life singing. She couldn't read a note

and couldn't sing in parts, and was not a great musical person, but she loved to sing! And I want to tell you something, mothers, the best thing you can do for your children is to sing! And fathers too, for that matter! It will bring God's presence right into your home! It will make it very real to your children! They'll never know what it's like to grow up without a song! (It's the best ear training, by the way, that you could give your children, and they have to have ear training if they are going to learn to sing.) I want everybody to leave the congregation this morning *determined* that song is going to be a prominent part of his everyday experience.

I want to show you another reason why I believe that singing opens us up to the world of the spiritual. Turn to 2 Kings 3. In this incident, Moab had come up to attack Judah. Judah had then gotten Israel and Edom together to fight against Moab, and when they went out to fight, they ran out of water! They were in dire trouble. Somebody remembered to call on Elisha. Look at verse 15: "But now bring me a minstrel." [This is Elisha, the great prophet! How did he make contact with God for the help these people needed? Music!] "And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him." And he said, "Make this valley full of ditches." And you know what happened—they made the valley full of ditches, and it didn't even rain, but the next morning, the ditches were full of water (though it didn't rain the night before) and they looked like blood—then these Moabites got afraid, and so they fled. And these people ran after them, and attacked them from behind, and slew many of them—again, a great victory. But I want to point out: even Elisha knew that the very best contact he could make with God was through music! When I study this subject, I wonder why this resource is so neglected! I understand why when the church goes

into apostasy, one of the first things the devil takes from them is their song! He knows (if we don't know it, he does) that that's our most powerful weapon! And when churches are in apostasy, they are without a song! The devil loves it, because they have just thrown aside the most powerful weapon they have to fight against him. Turn to 1 Chronicles 25:1. "Moreover David and the captains of the host separated to the service of the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophesy with harps, with psalteries, and with cymbals"—Isn't that interesting! We often talk about prophesying—Paul says he would that every person would prophesy; well here is something maybe we should take into consideration! These people prophesied with music! It was the key to the best insight they could get into the will of God! No wonder it says in Psalm 89:15: "Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound: They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance." Music gives us prophecy. It gives us direction! So the next time that somebody comes to you and says, Brother, I'm having trouble finding direction in life, your answer should be: Sing, Brother, sing! Many is the time that I've found myself confused and frustrated, and singing cleared it, and God's will became clear to me, and I was able to walk in the light of His countenance!

Songs of true worship are associated with power, and they always were associated afterward with the most powerful things that happened in the Bible. We have the song of Moses in Exodus 15, right after the Red Sea. Deborah, and Barak, after their victory over Habor, and Sisera, in Judges 5, sing a very interesting song—you don't find out what happened in that battle until you read the song! You just find out that Sisera was defeated; he came running and Jael drove a tent peg through his head. That's all you find out, but if you have

the song you find out what happened as Sisera was up there on the mountain. He had chariots—Israel didn't have chariots, they were foot soldiers—and they were there in the valley, and they were scared to death of chariots because these chariots were made of iron, and they usually had swords fastened to their axles, and someone could just come swooping down through a bunch of foot soldiers and saw off their legs with those chariots, and so Israel was terrified of those chariots, but God had told them not to have chariots. So here they were, standing in the valley, and Sisera says this is a piece of cake. He thought he would just swoop down off this mountain, and they were all going to look like grass lying on the ground. But what he didn't count on was up the valley at the river, God sent a huge thunderstorm. By the time Sisera got down off the mountain into the valley the river had overflowed and the valley was mud! His chariots got stuck and the wheels came off! The children of Israel pursued the people, and killed them, one after another. In fact the Bible says the stars fought against this poor man! But it was associated here with song! The last words of Moses were two beautiful songs outlining the attributes of God and His wonders among them, and ends with some pretty severe judgments that were all in the song, and the second one was a song basically of blessing upon these people, tribe by tribe.

Let me put in a little comment: Those songs were more than just five words projected upon a wall sung fifty times. Seven-Eleven songs, I call them: seven words sung eleven times. We have good examples in the Scripture as to what God calls songs! They have content! They tell us something! Now we can sing Alleluia, Alleluia, and I'm sure we'll do a lot of that in heaven too, but I don't want to sing that all Sunday, every Sunday. It's okay occasionally, but most of our singing should be instruct-

ing our minds, and inspiring our hearts, and saying something of worth, about what we believe about God, and understanding His will for our lives!

Some other incidents: Christ sang before going to Gethsemane. I think He did it for the same reason we've been talking about. I think it was one of the weapons that He took in His grasp, when He marched out to that dreadful death! He knew He needed this! Luther's enemies said he's done more harm with his songs than with any of his sermons. The Anabaptists sang at the stake—the witness of those people singing in the most inhumane and unbelievable circumstances was so effective that they finally had to execute them secretly because the song of these people was so powerful and so effective. The Wesley revivals were carried along by song as well as were the Moravian revivals.

Well, my first point was that music is associated with supernatural power. It's one of the most important and one of the most crucial weapons that you and I have. The second point I'd like to make is:

Music Is Important to God

I want you to turn to an interesting Scripture in Zephaniah 3:17. Speaking to the future glorification of Israel, it says, "*The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty: he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee **with singing.***" I can't wait to hear that! Can you imagine what it must sound like when God sings! No wonder we are supposed to sing. We are made in His image and He is a singer! **God is a singer!** And He left us with a tremendous witness to that! There are over three hundred references in the Bible to song, urging us to sing unto the Lord! It doesn't say that this is a suggestion—it's a command! But like all of God's commands, we love them! They're not

grievous! And, of course, we have a whole book of the Bible devoted to nothing but songs! Psalm 33:3—“*Sing unto him a new song; play skillfully with a loud noise.*” Now the Bible talks repeatedly about this new song. That tells me something about music. **Music is NOT amoral.** Before people are converted, they sing a song, and when they are converted, they sing a different song! He says, sing a NEW song! Psalm 40:1-3—“*I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear [just like in the days of Jehoshaphat], and shall trust in the Lord.*” Do you want to evangelize? Three times He tells us to sing in Psalm 96:1: “*O sing unto the Lord a new song: sing unto the Lord, all the earth. Sing unto the Lord, bless his name; shew forth his salvation from day to day.*” Psalm 98:1—“*O sing unto the Lord a new song; for he hath done marvelous things: his right hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory.*” Psalm 144:9—“*I will sing a new song unto thee, O God: upon a psaltery and an instrument of ten strings will I sing praises unto thee.*”

So what is this new song about?

Well, if you look at all these references, it's always about God's mighty works, especially His work of salvation and deliverance! The word *salvation* means “to salvage,” to bring a person out of a bad situation into a good situation. In fact, that's what most of the Psalms are about. Many of the Psalms follow a pattern—they start out with a problem, and they end up with praise. So the psalmist starts out by saying, “You have ransacked me, you have searched me, I can't handle this, Lord—I can't get away, I can't do anything about it! You know everything I'm thinking and

everything I'm doing—You know my words before I say them and I can't handle this kind of scrutiny!” And then, in the middle of the psalm, he starts to contemplate God (and here's the worship), who God really is, and he realizes that when God sees a problem, He begins to salvage; so if He sees a mistake in your life, He doesn't clobber you—He starts to redeem! When the psalmist realizes that, see how he ends the psalm: “Ransack me, God, and know my heart! And see if there be any wicked way in me!” When in the beginning, he didn't want the Lord to see that, in the end, he says: “Please, ransack me and see if there be any wicked way in my life, and lead me in the way everlasting.” Praise all the way through! For God's salvation! Psalm 96: “*O sing unto the Lord a new song: sing unto the Lord, all the earth. Sing unto the Lord, bless his name: shew forth his salvation from day to day.*” So that's what we're going to do! We're going to sing the mighty delivering power of God in our lives! So what else is going to be the content of our songs? Verse 3 says, “*Declare his glory among the heathen.*” It's going to be a description of God's magnificent character! Glory, as I understand it, is an expression of excellence. We talk about the glory of a sunset, and we mean that nothing could be added to it—it's already perfect. And that's what we sing about—we sing about the excellence of God's characteristics. One of the reasons that it's so necessary in our day is that most people have a very pitiful, pitiful concept of God. And we need to tell the world about His magnificent character! They need to hear that. Sing and declare His glory! Then he goes on to say, “*For the Lord is great, and greatly to be praised: he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the Lord made the heavens. Honour and majesty are before him: strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. Give unto*

the Lord, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come into his courts. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." We should tell the whole world that we have been made whole—that's beautiful!

After 9/11, I began contemplating other religions of the world, and I made an amazing discovery that I should have known before. I always had the impression that the heathen gods promised something they couldn't deliver. And then all of a sudden it struck me: They don't even offer it! It's not that they offer it and can't deliver—they don't even offer it! Mohammed doesn't offer an agent that cleanses sin! Islam says, that if you keep the month of Ramadan (sic) by fasting during the day, and you make a pilgrimage to Mecca, and you pray five times a day (and there are two other ones which I can never remember) when you meet Allah, you just might incur his favor, but you can't be sure. In fact, if you want to witness to a Muslim, say to them, "Is Allah holy?" "Why yes!" "Are you holy?" "No." "How do you hope to stand in Allah's presence someday?" And they will be speechless! They have no blood! Declare this to the heathen, who are scared to death of their gods! You better start singing—(They don't know that there is one God and He has offered an agent to cleanse them of their sin! They don't know it!) "Rock of ages, cleft for me—Let me hide myself in Thee. Let the water and the blood, from thy riven side which flowed, Be of sin the double cure! Save from wrath and keep me pure! Cleanse me from its guilt and its power!" What an offer! Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness! Demonstrate to the world the effect of that blood, and what it has done for you in your life!

Let's turn to Psalm 100 in bringing this to conclusion. "*Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands.*" The whole

earth is called to praise. "*Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing.*" When you went into the presence of a king, in those days, you always brought a present that had the greatest value of any gift you could accumulate. When the wise men came to Christ, they brought very expensive gifts. There are people that go charging into God's presence without any gift! That won't do—He's a great king! You can't come into His presence without a gift! What gift does He want? A heartfelt song! The heathen come into the presence of their gods with dread and fear—we're commanded to serve a good God with gladness! "*No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly!*" So we come with our gifts of praise with joy. "*Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.*"

It's not that we don't have enough to praise Him about, is it?

***What Makes Good, Godly Music?
What Makes Worldly Music?
Is There Really a Difference?***

First Chronicles 12:32—"*And of the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do; the heads of them were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their commandment.*" We need these men today, in an age when most Christians do not know that the gospel and entertainment are incompatible. Many do not understand that those two are the antithesis of each other. The word *muse* means to think, or to meditate. *Amuse* means "**not** to think or to meditate," much like *amoral* means "not moral" or *atypical* means "not typical." The church once sang

“We Stand Amazed in the Presence.” The modern church might as well sing “I Stand Amused in the Presence.” You simply don’t dwell in God’s presence that way. We have people today that believe that worship is synonymous with excitement! In reality, worship is often very quiet. Sometimes, it’s exuberant—but excitement doesn’t equate with worship. If we’re going to go down the road of contemporary music, down the road we’ll have worship teams leading our services, and we’ll have instrumental music—especially percussion. Wouldn’t it be sad if, in twenty years, we find ourselves somewhere where we don’t want to be?

Music is a very powerful thing—even **the heathen knew this**. Socrates said, “Let us write the words to the music of our nation, and we care not who writes its laws,” saying in effect that it would be the words and songs that people would sing and hear in Greece that would determine what would happen to the nation. In fact, David at one time said something similar—he said, “Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage”! Listen to this text:

My God, I thank Thee, who has made the earth so bright, so full of splendor and of joy, beauty and light. So many glorious things are here, noble and right.

I thank Thee, too, that Thou hast made joy to abound. So many joyful thoughts and deeds circling us round, that in the darkest spot of earth, some love is found.

I thank Thee more that all our joy is touched with pain, that shadows fall on brightest hours—that thorns remain; so that earth’s bliss may be our guide and not our chain.

I thank Thee, Lord, that Thou hast kept the best in store; we have enough, yet not too much to long for more, a yearning for a deeper peace not known before.

I thank Thee, Lord, that here our souls though amply blessed can never find, although they seek a perfect rest, nor ever shall, until they lean on Jesus’ breast.

I challenge you to find a contemporary song that says something like that. The author, Adelaide Anne Procter, died in her thirties—I suspect that she was sick all her life—and this is her testimony. And if you have people singing those types of songs, you’re going to have a certain kind of people. They will be a people that know how to face pain, and know how to rejoice in sorrow and know the value of shadows, and the things in life that people normally don’t choose.

So you see why Socrates said what he did. His student Plato said this: “The introduction of a new type of music must be shunned, as endangering the whole state. Because the styles of music are never disturbed without affecting the most political institution.” His student, Aristotle, said this: “Music directly represents the passions or states of the soul: gentleness, anger, courage, temperance. If one listens to the wrong type of music, he will become the wrong kind of person, and vice versa.”

Now these were not Christians! They were pagan Greeks!

Why is music so powerful? Music addresses the whole being. It actually transcends even the conscious thought and reaches the deepest part of our being, which is our desire. When the Hebrews talked about the heart, they always considered it the seat of desire. And your desire is the deepest part of your being. Music goes straight to the heart, the root of your desires. That’s why Proverbs says, “Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.”

Schumann, the composer, said, “Music is the perfect expression of the soul. Whatever is inside a person will be

evidenced finally in his music.” One particular heathen culture has music with floating melodies that never have any resolution or ending—it’s much like the New Age music of today. The reason for this: their basic concept of life is that life goes in circles, with no ending in sight. It’s not fitting for Christians to sing this type of music, because we know that life isn’t that way—things are all going somewhere. Another heathen culture has pulsating, chanting rhythms that show the restless emotions of the heathen heart. Contemporary music, with very few exceptions lacks a sense of direction, is in many cases atonal (without a real sense of harmony), and has rhythms that introduce misdirection into the song. But as we said, the new birth should give us a new song. The Christian should have a distinct kind of song, not borrowed from another source. Even the songs that Anabaptists used as tunes for their songs were of a generally moral culture heavily influenced by Western civilization, which was heavily influenced by Christianity. Even the folk music of the culture was good, sound music.

Turn to 1 Samuel 16:22, 23. This passage tells us what David’s music did for Saul when an evil spirit troubled him:

And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, Let David, I pray thee, stand before me; for he hath found favour in my sight. And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed [the word literally means he physically breathed easier], and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.

So we see from this passage that music affects us **physically**. We also know that rock music affects 9 out of 10 people in weakening muscle tone. This is because rock music is the exact opposite of the rhythm of the beating heart. The heartbeat is a long, a short, and a pause. Rock music is short, short, long,

pause. It sets up a conflict in the normal rhythms of the body.

We also see from this passage that music affects us **mentally**. Did you know that department stores and grocery stores play music in their stores that makes their customer more disposed to buy whatever products the store offers?

Finally, we see that music affects us in a **spiritual way**—“the evil spirit departed from him.” Demons are uncomfortable around certain kinds of music! (That’s the kind of music that I want!) On the other hand, demons are seemingly very comfortable with other types of music! *Halley’s* says that congregational singing, next to the Bible and Bible teaching, is the best feature of a religious service, and one of the most effective ways to preach the gospel.

Here are some dynamics of good music:

1. Good music has a varied, repetitious, and dominant melody, with a variety of chords. Bad music has monotonous and fragmented melody with no direction and/or resolution and constantly repeated chords with no variety.

Did you know that for years, the church sang no harmony or used any instruments? They sang only the melody. That’s where the definition of music needs to rest—any harmony must have a variety of chord changes. Both repetition and variation are important in music, in speaking, in architecture—because it keeps the attention of the listener. Repetition without variation will bore the listener, and no repetition will make it hard for the listener to keep focused.

2. Good music has varied levels of intensity, but is always under control. Bad music is unrestrained—it’s just one long, loud noise.

You can hear it coming down the

road, even in a car with the windows up!

3. Good music has varied and accurate rhythms. Bad music has unvaried repetition of a rhythmic pattern, with unnatural accents that dominate the song.

In other words: *Good music has a dominant melody, harmony that supports the melody, and rhythm that supports both.* Compare this to what the world gives us: music with very little melody, with some harmony, but heavy, heavy rhythm.

Thoughts From the Question-and-Answer Session

(About the use of musical instruments in worship) The phrase “a capella” means “of the church”—a description of the unaccompanied song that was the standard part of the church in centuries past. While musical instruments have a purpose for education and wholesome recreation, the purest form of worship is unaccompa-

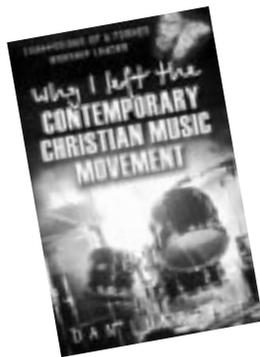
nied song. The presence of instruments makes it more difficult to discern music for worship and music for entertainment purposes. Saints from all centuries of church history speak against the presence of instrumental music in worship.

Psalm 149:6, 7: “Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand; to execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people.” In many instances the Lord has used the singing of believers to turn back those seeking to rob nonresistant Christians. Also many Christians, especially overseas missionaries, used singing as a weapon in fighting off demonic influence.

There is a danger, in our world of tape recorders and CDs, of getting so absorbed in listening to music that we neglect singing ourselves and getting the greater benefit. ■

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Why I Left the Contemporary Christian Music Movement



by Dan Lucarini

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Swift Seduction

A Look at the Spirit and Growth of Contemporary Christian Music

by Dean Taylor

“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” (Colossians 3:16).

“Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God” (3 John 11).

I can still remember many of the youth group activities that my Baptist church took us to when I was young. Water slides, pizza parties, and movie night lock-ins were common. But probably the most influential activity we indulged in was loading the youth group into buses and heading off to mega-church auditoriums or conference halls to hear the new emerging phenomena known as Contemporary Christian Music.

It was the late 1970s and the more progressive youth groups were really pushing this new fad. It seemed innocent. These early concerts usually ended with an altar call and many young people responded to the request and recited a sinner’s prayer. With so many “decisions” reported back at church on Sunday morning it seemed no one could argue with it.

My pastor was relatively young, new and full of innovative ideas. I can remember some of the people laughing at how backward the former, older pastor was. One of the common jokes on the way to Christian rock concerts was laughing at the fact that, only a few years prior, the church had experienced a revival that had resulted in people burning their rock and Christian rock albums in a burn barrel right out in the church’s main parking lot. They said that the event even made the local newspapers. They were then all quick to agree, “it really put the church in a negative light.” How quickly things were changing for the better . . . or so we thought.

The sad thing for me was that before this I had never even liked rock music. My brother played it a lot but I never had a taste for it. However, about once a month we either hosted one of these concerts ourselves or we headed off to another place to hear one. Eventually, I began to crave the sound and started to purchase as much of the music as I possibly could.

I can vividly remember those concerts. We would brag on how exciting and wild the music would get. It would seem to me that some bands like Petra, Rez Band, and Mylon Lefever would see just how far they could push the Christian envelope. Anyone who dared the next “radical thing” would get all of us talking. Just like the secular concert-goers, we bought T-shirts, screamed for the musicians and some even waved lit cigarette lighters.

I can remember thankfully, that some protested, but we were quick to label them as “old fashioned,” “legalists,” and “out of touch” with our generation. Besides, people were getting saved . . . or at least that is what we thought.

One by one, I saw my friends going on to secular rock, sin, and godless lives. Once they hit high school, all caution was thrown to the wind. Many still went to church, they would even respond at some of the revival meetings, but all of us were completely ignorant of a Holy God and His standards for our lives. Few, if any, had any conviction at all to search out God’s Word and live a godly life.

Once the young people in the youth group reached dating age it seemed the only goal that the youth ministers had was to keep the young ladies from having children before they were married. Still faithfully, month-by-month, off we went to hear the newest and most progressive Christian rock band. There is no doubt in my mind that this influence in my life gave me a taste for rock music that led to my eventual acceptance of and even thirst for the secular rock culture later in my life. Rock music has a persuasive and even demonic power to it—it can become addictive just like drugs or alcohol. It may not appeal on the first try, but the more it is taken in, the more you seem to crave it.

In those days the warning signs were a little harder to recognize. I remember going to see an “unknown” young lady at the time—Amy Grant—sitting on a stool and playing nice songs like “Father’s Eyes” on her guitar. Sandi Patti sang at my wife’s (then girlfriend’s) church and it all seemed okay. Keith Green was trying to do a lot of evangelism, Petra said they wanted to reach the lost, and I can even remember the Imperials saying they should try not to dance on stage. But the insidious disease had already long-affected all of us. Warning signs were everywhere but because we all loved the music so much we explained all of them away. Likewise, I believe the musicians themselves were led from one compromise to another ignoring the warning signs as this industry grew.

That was over twenty years ago, and by the grace of God my wife and I have been saved from that seductive stronghold. Over these years I have been more and more removed from this culture. Today, when I think of these types of problems in the church, I tend to think of them as they were 15 years ago. However, since then, this Christian rock culture has only proceeded from bad to worse, with few Christians recognizing the heinous beast that it has become today.

Hardly any church is free from its influences. Since those early days, the Christian

music companies have sold out to larger, secular music companies that are owned by completely secular management or stockholders. The sale of Contemporary Christian Music outsells that of Jazz and Classical combined. The musicians have become rich and the message has become adulterated.

In preparing John D. Martin’s, “Sing the New Song,” for this issue, I wanted to do some research to see just how the Christian music scene has progressed in the last 15 years. In doing this I was completely shocked. I knew it was bad, but just how bad—I had no idea.

Following is a sample of some interviews and direct quotes taken from some of the leading artists of our day. I apologize in advance that they are rather graphic and very disturbing. As I was gathering these quotes I had to discard most of them because they were simply too grievous to print. Scandals, divorces, and unrepentant adulterous relationships were all too easy to find. It seemed that some of the biggest names had some of the worst family lives. As you read these quotes, please remember these are real people, with real lives, involved in real sin. Please pray for their repentance. I am mostly repeating only the quotes or incidents that were boldly stated or performed by the musicians themselves, rather than what was said about them. Much, much more could have been said. Most of the research has been taken from two publications, “Christian Rock: Blessing or Blasphemy,” by Terry Watkins, and “The Seduction of Our Youth,” by Carol Guffey.

To the shame of the Christian church, she has received this invasion with hardly a word. Even the world has taken notice of what they see as obvious mixed messages. *People Magazine* (July 15, 1991, p. 71) says of Amy’s video *Baby, Baby*, “There’s saintly Amy cuddling some hunky guy, crooning ‘Baby, Baby’ into his ear and looking pretty sleek and sinful . . .” When asked about similar inconsistencies from *Rolling Stone* magazine, Amy confesses, “I’m trying to look sexy to sell a record . . .” (*Rolling Stone*, June 6, 1985, p. 10).

In a candid interview with *Ladies Home Journal* (December, 1985, p. 100) Amy stated, "I have a healthy sense of right and wrong, but sometimes, for example, using foul, exclamation-point words among friends can be good for a laugh."

Speaking about what she considers a "no fun" stigma on the Christian, Amy says, "Why isolate yourself? Your life isolates you enough. I'm isolated when I walk into a room and somebody says, 'She's a Christian,' and nobody offers me a joint and all the coke (cocaine) disappears . . ." Amy also says, "I remember years ago—the first time I smelled anybody smoking a joint at a concert, I was thrilled . . . it meant to me that obviously this person is not affected by the church peer pressure" (Bob Millard, *Amy Grant*, [New York, 1986], p. 169). Ex-husband Gary Chapman even confessed in *People Magazine* (July 15, 1991, p. 72) of a six-year cocaine and marijuana addiction.

Moving quickly into music videos, the Contemporary Christian market has wasted no time. Sadly, the pace to mix and flirt with witchcraft and the occult has also been a fast one. In Amy Grant's video, "That's What Love Is For," copying the dress style of professed witch, Stevie Nicks, Amy is dressed in a hooded red robe, as is used in witchcraft rituals. Flashing strangely on the palms of each hand, she has fixed a six-pointed-star called a hexagram, which is a symbol heavily associated with occult practices. It is hard to believe that this is a coincidence or accident. These videos cost thousands of dollars to produce. They are researched and choreographed to the smallest detail.

Speaking of the youth in attendance at Michael W. Smith concerts, it was reported by the *Tulsa Tribune*, "Smith, with synthesizers blaring, drums blazing, and guitars screeching, sent a young crowd into a frenzy from beginning to end." Another source said, "With sweeping strobes lighting the stage and crowd areas, Smith took the stage with some twirling dance steps that sent the crowd into a rocking frenzy.

The moment Smith's hands hit the air, the audience responded with over-the-head hand claps and stomping feet."

Inside Music Magazine, interviewing Michael W. Smith said, "There's also the influence of such groups as Alan Parsons in your music. It's especially noticeable on the first record, *The Michael W. Smith Project* (named after Alan Parsons' album, *The Alan Parsons Project*.)" Smith's reply: "Definitely!"

Terry Watkins (author of the tract, "Christian Rock: Blessing or Blasphemy") commenting on this interview, remarks, "Alan Parsons is among the most occultic in rock! Alan Parsons has songs entitled: 'Lucifer,' and the blasphemous 'Genesis Ch. 1 V. 32.' (There is no Genesis chapter 1, verse 32!) Alan Parsons' album, *Eye in the Sky*, has on the cover (and back) the Eye of Horus (also called the Eye of Lucifer). Not surprisingly, Smith also has an album titled, *I2(EYE)*. Of course, the name of Jesus is nowhere to be found. (Did you really think it would be?)"

Of the musician Carman one magazine reported, "One of the first song routines Carman swings into is a jazzed-up 50's imitation of Elvis Presley called 'Celebrating Jesus.' Carman shakes, stutters, and shim-mies just like the 'King' himself, as the crowd cheers and be-bops in the aisles."

Of the group Whitecross, a publication reported on their concerts stating, "a hot new six-piece band from Rhode Island, got the place rocking with a blend of pop metal melodies and straight-ahead power . . . The crowd was in a frenzy by the time Whitecross appeared, and the front of the auditorium was packed with screaming metalheads."

The popular Dove Award winning group DC Talk made the *Dallas Morning News*, (April 27, 1996) when they reported on their concert series entitled "Freak Show." "As teenagers' shrieks filled the Dallas Convention Center moments before DC Talk took the stage Friday night, one of the relatively few grown-ups in the sold-out crowd observed, 'This is just like the Beatles.'"

Keeping in line with the Roman Catholic push for One World Ecumenism (one world church), Contemporary Christian artists have begun joining together with people of other faiths as well. Carol Guffey (author of the tract, *The Seduction of Our Youth*) reports: "Popular CCM musician Michael Card led the singing for the 'Evening of Friendship' in Salt Lake City, November, 2004. The crowd was composed of Mormons and Evangelical Christians. The *Desert Morning News* wrote that 'he doesn't see Mormonism and Evangelical Christianity as opposed to each other; they are more like the two ends of a long chord—part of the same thing.' Card said, 'The older I get, I guess the more I want to integrate everything.' Card now has the distinction of having the greatest ecumenical reach of any of the CCM artists."

Friendship Fest, "A historic gathering between Christians and Muslims," took place in Morocco, May 6-8, 2005. NAE states "the goals of Friendship Fest are to make use of the universal language of music to bridge cultures and make friends, to set a good example of religious tolerance by engaging in respectful dialogue." CCM Musicians from the U.S. and Morocco will be performing on the same stage in a collective celebration for peace and tolerance. Participating artists will be Newsboys, Stacie Orrico, Phil Keaggy, Delirious, Jeremy Camp, Out of Eden, and Rock and Roll Worship Circus.

The Bible states plainly, "*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?*" (2 Corinthians 6:14). During these "Christian" concerts, not only are ecumenical agendas propagated, but some of the most worldly and satanic music is mixed right in:

- **Jars of Clay** admits that they listen to Ozzy Osbourne (a self-professed Satanist) and even sing his song "Crazy Train" during their concerts.
- **Amy Grant** plays Joni Mitchell (professed New Age follower).

- **Johnny Cash** plays Danzig, Beck, and SoundGarden.
- **Petra** plays Argent, Ditto, and KISS.
- **77's** plays Led Zeppelin, DC Talk plays Doobie Brothers, Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, Nirvana, and REM.
- **Audio Adrenaline** plays Edgar Winter.
- **Point of Grace** plays Earth, Wind and Fire (professed New Age followers and Pantheists.)
- **Rez Band** plays The Who and Jefferson Airplane.
- **Holy Soldier** plays Rolling Stones.
- **Rachel** plays Kansas.
- **Deliverance** plays Black Sabbath (very outspoken Satanists).
- **MXPX** plays Buddy Holly.

Here are a few direct quotes taken from other leading Contemporary Christian musicians:

Rich Mullins: "I'm really sick of all this heavy-handed Christianity. Musicians take themselves too seriously. They should have more fun, and they should stop preaching unless that's what God has called them to. If I want to hear a sermon, I'll go to church, thank you." (*CCM Magazine*, April, 1987, p. 12)

Wayne Watson: "There's one way I won't write. I won't write a song that says, 'You better get right with God.' From my own experience, I find that way sometimes makes people defensive . . ." (*Christian Activities Calendar*, Spring/Summer, 1989, p. 111)

Creed: "We cannot say this enough. We are not a 'Christian' band. We have no agenda to lead others to believe in our specific beliefs. Drug use is allowed in the band, but nothing more than you could grow in your own back yard. And I love women." (*USA Weekend*, 2002). "We've always just had a positive message. I grew up listening to Slayer, Celtic Frost, and Metallica. The last thing I ever thought people would say was that I was in a Christian band. After a while of us going, "No, we're not . . . no, we're not . . . no, we're not," it got to a point there was not much more we could

say or do aside from coming out with satanic T-shirts onstage.” (*Rolling Stone*)

Michael English: In 1994, Michael English swept the Gospel Music Association’s Dove awards, winning six awards, including the prestigious Artist of the Year. But a few days later, English confessed publicly to marital infidelity with a leading musician from another popular Contemporary Christian group, First Call.

Audio Adrenaline: “This is a call to save the church and reshape and reform ideas . . . to not be afraid to stand up and challenge fundamental thoughts.” (Interview, *CCM Planet*, 2/25/03)

Jars of Clay: “We don’t have a specific audience in mind . . . we’re not writing songs that are intentionally geared for a Christian audience versus a regular mainstream audience. There’s an understanding that when people say ‘Christian,’ and some of it’s just Western civilization, that there’s an agenda that will come along with that and there’s a guidelines and a standard and people can expect to be served something that they are going to have to digest on some level” (*CNN Entertainment*).

Sixpense None the Richer: Front woman Leigh Nash says she’s “really fed up with being pigeonholed as ‘that Jesus band.’ The Christian thing doesn’t follow Creed or Lifehouse around, does it? It’s so irritating—80% of the articles written about us, ‘Christian’ is in there somewhere. It’s always a banner, and we just don’t wanna carry that around anymore. People with all their religious claims and . . . just gets old. I don’t wanna read their books and I don’t wanna hear ’em talk. I just wanna know what I believe, and try and quietly nurture that, so I can be a little stronger when I go out and face the world again” (Tom Lanham, *The Examiner*, 6/23/03).

Point of Grace: Speaking about the musical group Point of Grace, Terry Watkins reports: “The album ‘I AM’ has a cross of Christ in the center with an embryo and an old man in the center with a temple in the foreground. Their song ‘Serpentine Fire’ is based on the new age teach-

ings found in Shah Kriza Yogi Meditation Cult. On Point of Grace’s album, ‘Life, Love and Other Mysteries’ is ‘Sing a Song,’ by Earth, Wind and Fire.” The writer of “Sing a Song” is Maurice White—a lifelong Buddhist!

There is so much more that I could have written. This is just a sample of the tip of the iceberg. However, I think it should be enough to demonstrate some serious problems in the Contemporary Christian industry. If you are still listening to this music please pray and ask God to show you the way of truth. This industry has deteriorated much in the 20 years that I have known about it. Old songs like “My Father’s Eyes” and “Rise Again” are far removed from today’s taste. However, in even those seemingly innocent songs of years-gone-by we should have seen the warning signs. But now . . . how could there be any excuse? Jesus warns us, “wisdom is justified of all her children” (Luke 7:35). I think it is past time for the Bride of Christ to take a sober, honest look at this insidious intruder.

It could obviously be argued that I have only portrayed the bad things and that there are some good, edifying exceptions in the world of CCM. This may be true, but I feel a strong urgency that someone needs to blow the trumpet here. If we turn a blind eye then what is to be the final end of it all? Not to mention the fact that trying to find edifying exceptions is much like digging through the trash bin to find a decent meal. May the Lord open our eyes and grant us wisdom and discernment.

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

“Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear” (1 Timothy 5:20).

“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather reprove them” (Ephesians 5:11). ■

—Reprinted with permission from Charity Christian Fellowship’s publication *The Heartbeat of The Remnant*, May/June 2005 issue. 400 W. Main Street, Suite 1, Ephrata, PA 17522.

Handclapping in Worship

by Donald P. Hustad

For some worship leaders, the practice of clapping in rhythm with the music, and/or of a frequent burst of clapping as expression of “approval” of some worship action, is commanded—or at least, authorized—by only one Scripture verse in Psalm 47:1: “Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout to God with loud songs of joy.”

However, when you check all the references to clapping in Scripture, a very different picture emerges. Three other passages speak of clapping as a symbol of approval, one passage in connection with the crowning of the young king Joash (2 Kings 11:12), and two others in which nature is characterized as responding to its Creator with praise (Psalm 98:8; Isaiah 55:12—“the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the fields shall clap their hands”).

However, though these four passages characterize clapping as a sign of approval, five others use it to express strong disapproval, even defiance of the living God:

For thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have clapped your hands and stamped your feet and rejoiced with all the malice within you against the land of Israel, therefore I have stretched out my hand against you (Ezekiel 25:6, 7).

It [the east wind of God’s judgment] claps its hands at them, and hisses at them from its place (Job 27:23).

For he adds rebellion to his sin; he claps his hands among us, and multiplies his words against God (Job 34:37).

All who pass along the way clap their hands at you; they hiss and wag their heads at daughter Jerusalem (Lam. 2:15).

All who hear the news about you clap their hands over you. For who has ever escaped your endless cruelty? (Nahum 3:19).

Some authorities quote Psalm 47:1 as God’s rubric for today, without explaining the full biblical record of changing cultural practices in ancient Israel. Further, certain individual churches and groups (including the Promise Keepers gatherings for Christian men) are absolutely consistent in resymbolizing this form of expression, as the Scripture suggests is possible. Clapping for them has become a response that is equivalent to saying “Amen.” They clap after congregational singing, they clap throughout the sermon, they clap when people respond to an “altar call.” I can imagine that eventually they might even clap for prayer, as members of Congress did when the flamboyant evangelist Billy Sunday once prayed at the opening of their session. However, though many groups have borrowed the less than reverent phrase “giving God a hand” as justification for their action, handclapping in a typical worship service makes no sense when it is only a reaction to stirring up the emotions by some type of exciting performance.

As a worship musician, either conducting a choir or playing the organ, when clapping happens after music, I want to say: “We intended the singing and playing to be sacrifices of praise to God, and would have been pleased if you had listened quietly and thankfully, responding to words with your own cognitive ‘Amen’ and to the music by ‘making melody to the Lord in your hearts’ (Eph. 5:19). If you had done so, all of us, performers and listeners alike, could have given a gift of praise to God. But your applause, even if well intended,

has robbed us both of that opportunity and privilege. Even if only for a few moments, you turned a service into a concert, exchanging worship for entertainment. And, if I ‘accept’ your applause to be recognized by others (Matt. 6:2, 5, 16), that’s all the ‘reward’ I will ever get for what I intended to be a worship gift to God.”

Come to think of it, perhaps this practice of clapping is a carryover from the world of sacred concerts, religious radio and television, all allied with the contemporary Christian businesses of recordings, videos, and published music. In those specialized experiences—combining entertainment with some elements of worship—applause is normal. Is it possible that much of today’s contemporary worship is simply Saturday night’s concert moved to Sunday morning, with a sermon added?

Other gatherings of believers seem to add confusion without giving answers. Christian conferences like Promise Keepers and even Billy Graham crusade services are unusual occasions that resemble a state fair or a Super Bowl event, and they offer significant but atypical worship experiences. The response on those special occasions of high emotion should not set the standard for typical worship in a local church.

It should be easy to see the temptations inherent in the practice of handclapping after music in church. People respond most vigorously to the music which stimulates them emotionally, and that never includes pieces of moderate tessitura or dynamics, even when they are God’s Word sung exquisitely. Soloists and music directors will tend to choose their music on the basis of information received from congregational applause, not for more significant reasons. Even so, many individuals insist that handclapping is their *chosen response*—that, at the very least, they are thanking God for giving talent to

the musicians. For me, the argument is not convincing. Such handclapping really says, “You did well and I enjoyed it.” Worship is not the place to praise performers on the basis of our personal pleasure or emotional stimulation. Rather, our motto should be that of the great church musician, Johann Sebastian Bach: *Soli Dei gratia*—“To God alone the praise.”

In modern church life, it is sometimes necessary to take action on some item of “social business” on Sunday morning, when the largest number of members is present. Such an occasion might be the recognition of an attending centenarian, or the departure of a member of the church ministry team. During worship, thanks can be given to God for His gift to the congregation of and through that person. At the service close the congregation can be called together for “business.” At that time, the acknowledgement of the individual might include the social “thank you” and applause of the congregation. Some will say that such care and distinction is irrelevant in our day. I contend that it may be unusual, but it is not irrelevant. In Romans 1:25, Paul says that idolatry is worshiping and serving “the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.” ■

—Taken from *True Worship* by Donald P. Hustad © 1998 WaterBrook Press.

Music

J. S. Bach said, “All music should have no other end and aim than the glory of God and the soul’s refreshment; where this is not remembered there is no real music but only a devilish hubbub. He headed his compositions: “J.J.” “*Jesus Juva*” which means “Jesus help me.” He ended them “S.D.G.” “*Soli Dei gratia*” which means “To God alone the praise.”

Rock—Right or Wrong?

A Closer Look at Rock

by Frank Garlock and Kurt Woetzel

Most Christians are not musical technicians. The great majority are unaware of the techniques, methods, and devices used to gain certain effects. The response on the part of the unsuspecting is frequently, "It sounds fine to me—nothing wrong with that; I like it. You don't—so what?"

A Tool to Influence

Yet music has become a primary force in the shaping of this generation's thinking and philosophy. It has changed an entire culture. You say, "That is surely an exaggeration." It is not an exaggeration, according to some very knowledgeable scholars who understand the influence contemporary music has had on Western society.

William J. Schafer, author of *Rock Music*, has made some interesting statements on this subject:

We must look at rock as one principal dialect in the language of culture.

. . . a strong counter-culture has built itself around a musical sensibility, with music as a basic mode of communication and esthetic expression.

Schafer goes on to say that rock music has become a "tool for altering consciousness." He is not opposed to rock music, but he states that it is a method to change the thinking of a people—a society. If there is an "altering of consciousness," there must be a change in direction. In which direction is man's thinking being pointed through music? Schafer gives a clear answer:

. . . rock has acted as a catalyst, a force uniting and amplifying ideas and feelings. It is a medium, a means of communicating emotions . . . the

medium is the message. Associated with rock, for instance, is a cult of irrationality, a reverence for the instinctual, the visceral—and a distrust of reason and logic; this form of anti-intellectualism can be highly dangerous, can lead to totalitarian modes of thought and action. Linked with this anti-intellectualism is an interest in the occult: magic, superstition, exotic religious thought, anything contrary to the main currents of Western thought. Also directly connected is an obsession with the unconscious mind; the force of drug culture has been its promise to reveal the hidden, instinctual man, to free the individual from restrictions and limitations of his conscious mind and his gross physical body.

In which direction is the believer's mind and thinking being directed? The philosophy espoused by this music is completely contrary to that of the Christian life.

What About the Words?

But you say, "Some of it must be good, because the words are not bad in all rock music." Yes, the words are not bad in all rock music. We will find, however, that the words are not very important when compared to the music itself. The music communicates "at a level below words." Schafer, along with many others, suggests that the words can virtually be disregarded—the music itself gives the message. Words simply reinforce what the music already proclaims.

Simon Frith, a graduate of Oxford University and the University of California at Berkeley, teaches sociology at the University of Warwick in England. He has written a very interesting book entitled *Sound Effects, Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock 'n' Roll*. Later in this

book, his work will contribute to an understanding of other aspects of music. For now, listen to what he has to say about the lyrics in rock and roll music:

. . . sociologists of popular music have always fallen for the easy terms of lyrical analysis. Such a word-based approach is not helpful at getting at the meaning of rock. . . . Most rock records make their impact *musically rather than lyrically*. The words, if they are noticed at all, are *absorbed after the music has made its mark* (italics mine).

. . . the music is loud, rhythmically insistent, built around techniques of arousal and release. Lyrics are assertive and arrogant, but the exact words are *less significant* than the vocal styles involved, the shrill shouting and screaming (italics mine).

Frith continues by discussing the sexual significance and implications of these sounds typically heard in the rock concert halls and recordings.

Because of the nature of this book, it is not appropriate to become as graphic as this secular author. It is important to note, however, that the sound, techniques, and antics frequently associated with rock are not meaningless or harmless as some suggest. They are deliberately planned, rehearsed, and designed to communicate a message.

From my discussion with Christians and non-Christians alike, it seems that the prevalent concern in music centers on the words, be they right or wrong, good or bad. Consider the issue of contemporary Christian music (CCM) in the light of the following statements.

Steven Halpern, Ph.D., is a well-known lecturer on the subject of health and nutrition. His book, *Tuning the Human Instrument*, includes some pointed remarks concerning the sounds to which Western society members expose themselves.

Words are incidental at best, or monotonous and moronic as usual. But the point is, that they don't matter.

What you dance to is the beat, the bass and drums. And with this mix and volume, not only is the beat sensed, but literally felt, as this aspect of the rhythm section *takes precedence over melody and harmony* (italics mine).

In addition to pointing out the insignificance of the words, Halpern has also hinted at an order in music: melody, harmony, and rhythm.

Dr. Richard Taylor, a graduate of Boston University, has compiled a brief but interesting work entitled *The Disciplined Lifestyle*. In it he makes frequent references to music. What does he say about the importance of the words?

Words are timid things. Decibels and beat are bold things, which can easily bury the words under an avalanche of sound. The bit of religion tagged on will only lend to the whole performance a fake aura of sanctity, but will not be an instrument which the Holy Spirit can use to bring awakening and conviction.

The final two thoughts on the matter of the importance of the words come from William Schafer.

Rock commentators often describe the music as a sharing of consciousness, a connection of sensibilities beyond the verbal level, *communication without words*, without verbal conceptualization (italics mine).

There is *no separation of form and content in rock*, since they are fused as a continuous experience, a package of simultaneous impressions and feelings (italics mine).

The form is the music, and the content is the lyrics. Schafer and others suggest that a person cannot evaluate the music separately from the words. The two form one experience—rock and roll.

In the face of such overwhelming evidence, some Christians still contend that rock music must be used in order to communicate to young people. One such opinion comes from Steve Lawhead. Formerly an editor with *Campus Life* magazine, Lawhead authored a book in

defense of Christian rock. In the following quotation he seems to be in agreement with many of the writers who have been cited:

Even when the intent is not easily expressed verbally, the emotional impact of the song is usually unmistakable. In other words, *the message comes through loud and clear emotionally, whether or not it is grasped cognitively* (italics mine).

So far he seems to agree with communication experts and scholars. Understanding may not have taken place cognitively, but emotionally there is communication. The message of the music is more important than the words. How can that which communicates sensuality be used to worship the Lord or to preach the gospel? Here is his answer one paragraph later:

When the rhythms of rock are put to use with the intention of worship, praise, edification or any other higher purpose, it becomes a distinctly different animal than the raging, devouring beast roaming at large through most rock albums. It is different *because it is infused with a different purpose* (italics mine).

That is like saying poison won't kill if it is administered with love! "But," the CCM people respond, "you don't understand; my motive is one of compassion." Poison kills, no matter what the motivation. The world-famous musician Pablo Casals has said of rock that it is "poison put to sound."

Neil Postman is the author of a very interesting book with a telling title: *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. He is a respected critic, educator, sociologist, and communication theorist who has written more than fifteen books. He is professor of communication arts and sciences at New York University, having been educated at State University of New York and Columbia University. It is obvious that this man is well qualified to address our area of study. Postman, who

gives no evidence of a salvation experience in his book, makes a statement which clearly exhibits the simple-minded approach of Mr. Lawhead's claim.

To maintain that technology [music] is neutral . . . is . . . stupidity plain and simple.

What is the significance of these statements in the light of sacred music? It is absurd to think that one can unite Christian lyrics with the medium of the world (rock music) and expect the meaning and communication to remain the same.

Furthermore, this kind of rationalization is in conflict with Scripture in that it proposes that right or wrong is established by oneself—one's own motivation. Man becomes the judge and jury of that which is right or wrong, since he is the only reliable source as to the purpose of his actions. That kind of thinking should sound familiar because it has been promoted for a long time. Existentialism is not only "*preached*" in rock music, but now it is presented as an argument *for* rock music by some Christians.

God has given several instances in His Word where such reasoning prevailed. One such example is found in 1 Samuel 15. Here Saul, rather than completely obeying God in "utterly destroying" the Amalekites (v. 20), regarded his own motivation and reasoning more than the Lord's. As a result of this disobedience, Saul's people suffered and Saul was rejected by God as the leader of the people.

True worship and praise take place in thorough obedience to God's commands. How can that "raging, devouring beast roaming at large" as a gentle, harmless lamb be accepted without changing any of its character? To answer "because it is infused with a different purpose" is akin to the response often heard from the world: "I can worship God in any way I please." Remember what Samuel said to Saul in 1 Samuel 15:22: "Behold, to obey

is better than sacrifice.”

Rock's Characteristics

Driving beat. In order to know what rock is, we must understand the specific characteristics that make it unique. First and most important is the beat. The rhythm in rock is the dominant part of the sound. The heavy emphasis on the beat is what distinguishes rock from every other type of music.

In his book, *The Art of Rock and Roll*, Charles T. Brown discusses the many types of rock music that have evolved since it was popularized by Elvis Presley. He makes the following statement about all kinds of rock:

Perhaps the most important defining quality of rock and roll is the beat, . . .

Rock and roll is different from other music primarily because of the beat.

This fact is critically important to understand; rock is different from *all other music* due to the heavy emphasis on the beat. Why is that so important? The two music therapists who wrote *The Music Within You* give the answer: “It is through our bodies that we first respond to the rhythm of music.” As Christians, we understand that the body is to be under control. Frith, the previously quoted English sociologist, speaks clearly about the importance of the beat in rock music. These comments are critically important to understand and remember. Later, as we evaluate and dissect music, we will notice that rhythm plays an important part in that evaluation. In a section entitled “Rock and Sexual Liberation,” Frith makes the following observation:

The sexuality of music is usually referred to in terms of its rhythm—it is the beat that commands a directly physical response.

These are not isolated opinions. There are many knowledgeable writers and experts in the fields of psychology of music, philosophy of music, and sociology of music who concur with such state-

ments and make considerably more pointed remarks. The great majority of these would have no experience in the Christian life or with the Christian community. Yet they perceive the issue of music and communication better, from a social and psychological perspective, than many Christians who have a spiritual viewpoint.

We ought not hide our heads in the sand and ignore or avoid this knowledge which exists in the world. Learning, discernment, and wisdom are not confined to the Christian community. The marvels of the space program cannot be ascribed mainly to the work of Christians. The electronic wizards of the world, the Japanese, have precious few in their research and development groups who would claim to know the Lord as Saviour. An attorney gives counsel and we Christians value such advice even though that attorney may not be a believer. A doctor gives opinion and recommendation and we respect it because of his position even though he may not be a Christian. Knowledge exists in the world and we use it freely. The same is true in the study of the psychology, philosophy, and sociology of music. Granted, there may be some “wise fools” in the more abstract social science field, but to the best of my knowledge and ability I have avoided including their ideas.

Documented evidence exists proving the effects of rhythm on the body. Carl E. Seashore in his study *Psychology of Music* makes the following conclusive statement: “. . . the perception of rhythm involves the whole organism.”

Are you still unconvinced? Listen to a medical doctor as he discusses the influence of the electric bass, the primary rhythm instrument of the rock group, upon the body.

I would remind our listeners that this is not a new concept. There are traditions throughout the world that speak to the power of music to exercise specific influence over certain body parts,

let alone over the emotions and “passions” of man . . . we have the testimony of electric bass players, who confirm the sensual effect of their low-toned instrument is not lost among the (particularly) female members of the audience.

Repetition and loud volume. Rock music would not be rock without endless repetition of rhythmic, harmonic, and melodic patterns. Certainly the characteristics of repetition and loud volume are not new to those who have tried to carry on a meaningful conversation while rock music dominated the area. While such music may have been only an annoyance to the hearer, these two qualities of rock music have deeper significance. Halpern suggests:

The loud volume, drums, and repetition of much of the contemporary rock genre bears a not-coincidental resemblance to trance music found in other parts of the world.

The Message of a Medium, or What Is Communicated Through Music?

Much has been written by communication experts regarding the message of rock music. Ellen Willis is a well-known author of many such articles on rock music in *The New Yorker*. In a *TV Guide* piece “Heroes of Rock ‘n’ Roll,” she reveals most of the themes communicated through rock music.

Although the music has changed over the years, the rebellious urges that created it remain the same. . . . I was reminded once more of the basic appeal of rock and roll—its irreverent, nose-thumbing quality. Everything about early rock and roll, from the sexy beat and sexy lyrics to Little Richard’s scream and Elvis’s hips and Jerry Lee Lewis’s anarchic piano, was a reproach to the stuffed shirts of the world. . . . It was considered a racial as well as a sexual threat to the established order. . . . Rock and roll was still fun, but it was something more—the lingua franca of a great cultural upheaval.

In an effort to identify the causes of the violence evident in society in recent years, M. Stanton Evans wrote an article entitled “What Killed John Lennon?” In this article he lists the names of well-known people who have been murdered or have had attempts on their lives: President Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Sharon Tate, George Wallace, President Ford, President Reagan, and John Lennon. His conclusion is rather interesting in light of the present quest for the message of rock music.

The most notable element in these episodes is the predominance of left-wing revolutionary zeal of one sort or another, but even that, I think, is more a symptom than a cause. What is reflected at a deeper level is metaphysical emptiness, of a sort promoted by fashionable philosophers who make it their business to tear down traditional values and beliefs. It is an emptiness that John Lennon himself helped to encourage in the nihilistic message of his songs.

Nihilism is the denial of any basis for knowledge or truth. It rejects any customary or traditional belief in morality or religion. Its purpose is to destroy existing social, political, or economic institutions in order to establish a new society. Evans suggests that this is what rock music preaches. From previous evidence, it can be concluded that the music itself helps to communicate this message.

Allan Bloom, a professor at the University of Chicago, makes the message of the rock sound clear in his book *The Closing of the American Mind*. He writes, “. . . rock music has one appeal only, a barbaric appeal, to sexual desire—not love, not eros, but sexual desire undeveloped and untutored.”

Frith, the English sociologist who was quoted earlier from *Sound Effects, Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock ‘n’ Roll*, echoes much of the sentiment that has gone before:

. . . rock fans . . . have always known that music's sensual truth isn't dependent on rules of expression. We respond to *the materiality of rock's sounds, and the rock experience is essentially erotic* (italics mine).

In light of these statements, is there any justification for listening to this kind of music? Yet in many Christian circles, not only is it listened to, but it is becoming more prevalent as acceptable music for "ministry."

The Greening of America is a very liberal book written by Charles A. Reich. In it he labels the new culture which has evolved over the last twenty years as "Consciousness III." He discusses the impact which the music of this period has had on speech, dress, art, morals, religion—all of life. Reich's conclusion includes graphic language inappropriate for this setting, but essentially he suggests that today's society has become a society obsessed with sensuality; and he credits music for much of that impact.

For Christians, the exact opposite

should be true. Even though the believer lives in the midst of a culture which has, by all these accounts, become sensual in virtually everything observed, the child of God is to reflect Romans 13:14: "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof."

Are Christians allowing into their hearts and minds music which will feed the flesh or music which will "put on" more of the Lord?

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world (1 John 2:15, 16).

For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he (Proverbs 23:7). ■

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Music and Worship

by Tim Fisher

If music in the worship service were man's idea, then it would be optional and we could do without it. But if music in the worship service is God's command, then we have no option. We are stewards of God's gift of music. God *did* ordain that music be a part of worship. 2 Chronicles 29:25 tells us that Hezekiah the king "set the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with psalteries, and with harps, according to the commandment of David . . . for so was the commandment of the Lord by his prophets." The elaborate temple structure that we have examined was not just a good idea of David's. It was elemental to worship because God demanded it. Music is not optional; it is God's plan. Its object is worship.

In order for us to show how music relates to worship, we must first arrive at a suitable definition of worship. The word originally was literally "worship"—to honor or ascribe someone's worth. The dictionary defines it as "reverence or devotion for a deity." These all express to a degree what worship is. As a church body, we are involved with worship each time we meet. Church (corporate) worship can be defined as what we do when we "meet with God, His Word, and His people in such a way that the mind is equipped, the will is committed, and the desire is kindled to the doing of God's will more and more."

This final definition expresses a great truth about worship. It is not an atmosphere or an emotion—though both of these might be involved. It is not simply being with God's people—though that too may be involved. Worship consists of two things: revelation and response. We can learn about God, but until that knowledge translates into action, we are

not truly worshiping God. In a worship service, the congregation is brought into contact with the revelation of God through His Word. We then respond to that revelation in our attention, in our giving, in our response to the invitation, and in our singing. Throughout the week we continue to worship God in our response to what He shows us about Himself.

Too many people approach the worship service as though it were entirely for their benefit, thinking God has no interest in receiving something from them. Donald Hustad states:

It is a common misconception of evangelicals that worship is evaluated by whether or not one "gets a blessing." Worship is first *giving* to God; any really significant "blessing" we may receive will be the result of that self-giving. It is proper to ask the people of God, the full congregation as well as the "appointed" musicians: What has it cost you to offer to God your "sacrifice of praise"?

As we come together for a service of worship, there are certain goals of the church in which music can and should take a part. Three essential goals are the glorification of God, the evangelization of the lost, and the edification of the saints. The last two grow out of the first, because they are practical ways in which we honor God.

The Glorification of God

Singing, too, honors God. Music in worship is commanded by God, and the content of our song should be the praise of God. This makes music an ideal medium for glorifying God.

- Psalm 50:23—Whoso offereth praise glorified me.

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- Psalm 100:2—Serve the Lord with gladness, come before his presence with singing.
- Psalm 147:1—Praise ye the Lord; for it is good to sing praise unto our God; for it is pleasant, and praise is comely.

Since music is an emotional expression, singing with sincerity indicates that our hearts are turned toward God. *Those who will not sing in church are showing that they may have nothing to sing about.* This is a bold statement, but it is perfectly consistent with scriptural testimony.

Singing provides an expression for our praise. Many times there are people in the congregation who want to praise God but cannot find the right words or the right example to get started. Singing provides both. We can affirm together the words of Scripture and sing other scriptural thought through the great songs of our faith. A good hymn will express in lofty language the glory and majesty of our Creator. Singing will allow us the opportunity of expressing ourselves in language that we often cannot formulate on our own. When you multiply that over scores or hundreds or even thousands of people, the experience is intensified all the more.

When we sing, through our emotions the door of our understanding is opened to things beyond the meaning of words. We sing ourselves into the grace of believing; too often we talk ourselves into doubt. So then, let us once in a while be filled with the freedom and the ecstasy of singing. The reward will be great.

Singing also creates an atmosphere for other forms of worship. Like it or not, visitors will judge the mood of a congregation by how it sings, because this is their first exposure to the people of the church. If the congregation is close to the Lord and singing well, it is immediately perceptible. However, if

the congregation is cold and quiet in the time of singing, it will rightly be perceived as a “dead church.” One of the greatest scenes in all of Scripture is found when Solomon dedicated the temple. The Bible tells us:

It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth forever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord; so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God (2 Chron. 5:13, 14).

Apparently God filled the house with His glory in response to the *unity* of the people in singing and worshiping Him. Their song of praise was sung as one voice by the singers, and God blessed it by His presence. This is the goal of any good church music program.

The Evangelizing of the Lost

True worship will produce the result of evangelism, but evangelism is no substitute for worship. We can have evangelism without revival, but we cannot have true revival without evangelism. Too often the spiritually cold Christian wants to legitimize his condition by trying to bear Christ’s burden of evangelism without bearing his own burden of obedience. *Music is never used in Scripture as a means of reaching the lost.* We saw in Psalm 40:3 that it was not hearing the song that caused many to fear and trust in the Lord, but it was seeing the change in the life and the praise. One author speaks of the “witness song” of Paul and Silas in jail; but Scripture tells us that they sang a song of praise to the Lord (Acts 16:25). It is true that the other prisoners heard the song, but they were not the audience—

God was.

David relates Israel's tragic captivity in Babylon:

For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? (Psalm 137:3, 4).

In Scripture we are told to sing "to the Lord," "in our hearts," "in the congregation of the saints," "in his tabernacle," "upon [our] beds," and even "among the nations" and "among the heathen," but never to them—only *to the Lord*. There are some good pastors who think that the purpose of the music program is to appeal to the lost. No, it is to glorify God.

There is no conflict here. Romans 3:23 tells us: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." A music program that exalts Christ will have an impact on a lost man who sees or hears it, but the impact will be in the exaltation of Christ, not the appeal of the music. As we glorify God, with God as our audience, the lost man gets the right perspective about his own sinfulness.

One of the major problems with the CCM crowd is that they believe the purpose of music is outreach. When outreach is your stated purpose, you will go to any lengths to justify almost anything in attempting to reach the lost. Indeed, this is exactly what we are seeing in the CCM movement today.

People are constantly saying, "But the teenagers of today's culture won't come to church. This is the only way we can reach them." John Blanchard answers this reasoning:

Is it true to say that it is the *unsaved* who insist on the music? Or is it nearer the truth to say that it is young *Christians* who enjoy it so much that they insist on it? Is it true that unconverted friends of Christians

adamantly refuse to attend any evangelistic presentation except a musical one? Or is it truer to say that they are almost never asked? Isn't it true that young Christians invite friends to gospel concerts as a first resort rather than as a last resort?

If so many thousands of teenagers are being saved each year, as is reported, through Christian rock music, where are they? Can we really believe the claims that so many Christian rock groups make? Remember, they ask us to judge them by their fruit. If they choose to use the music of rebellion, they will produce the fruit of rebellion.

God's proven method of witness is the "foolishness of preaching." If we had taken all the efforts of Christian teenagers to get the unsaved into Christian rock concerts over the last twenty years, and if we had channeled that same energy into the witness of the spoken and written Word of God, we would be experiencing much more of God's blessing today, with much more scriptural fruit in the lives of all involved. God is not totally dependent on us as musicians to win the lost. He gives us the opportunity, rather, to share in this noble effort if we are obedient to Him. He has committed His message to us, and our job is to keep the message pure from the sin of the world. He has given us the blessed Holy Spirit to do the work in people's hearts. We do not need manipulation, gimmicks, or phony emotional appeals to get people saved. The Holy Spirit has promised to use His Word as we faithfully proclaim it. Evangelism has been and is greatly aided by Christlike music presented by Christlike performers, but music is not primarily given to us for evangelism.

The Discipleship of the Saints

Likewise music is an ideal tool to help with discipleship. One of the most obvious benefits is the teaching of scriptural truth. Even our familiar verses—Eph-

esians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16—talk about “teaching and admonishing” and “speaking to yourselves.” Through the church music program, congregations are coming into constant contact with truth. Remember, people do not leave the church humming the sermon. By memorizing good songs, our congregations are actually memorizing good doctrine. Unfortunately, scriptural songs cannot completely overcome shallow teaching or preaching. The almost total use of topical sermons that tie a string of illustrations around an unexplained text coupled with a few “favorite” gospel songs is a technique that might keep the church content but cannot make it mature. We need to be sure we are singing songs with scriptural content. During the Reformation the Roman Catholic church said that Luther was doing more damage with his songs than with his preaching.

One of the most striking illustrations of this in the Bible is Moses’ song which he wrote for the children of Israel. God told Moses in Deuteronomy 31:19: “Now therefore write ye this song for you, and teach it the children of Israel: put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the children of Israel.” God went on to explain in verse 21: “And it shall come to pass, when many evils and troubles are befallen them, that this song shall testify against them as a witness; for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed.” Moses wrote the song and subsequently taught it to the people.

Music is useful in education. How many Scripture verses do you know today because of choruses that you learned as a child? What we learn in our songs can be a great help to us in times of need or discouragement. Do not miss the blessing of learning many of the great hymns by heart! Families would do well to own a copy of their church hymnal and make the songs a regular

part of family devotions. This will help your children learn that hymns are important for “life outside the church.”

Music also provides an opportunity to develop talent in the local church. What better place for our young people to be using and developing their talents! The church can provide a structure for education in the graded choir program, for performance in allowing different groups or individuals valuable performance experience in various services, and for observation in occasionally bringing in outside groups to serve as good role models. It is the job of the local church to train believers in the area of music. Where else are they going to get it? By developing young talent, we can insure that our church music program will continue in the future.

Second Corinthians 8:10, 11 speaks about the believer’s willingness to actually do that which he intended. These are excellent verses on the stewardship of talent. Verse 12 explains: “For if there first be a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.” We need to teach our congregations that their musical talents are gifts that demand stewardship, and that God has promised to bless their talents according to their willingness to use them. Selfish fear can be overcome with selfless service.

Most importantly, music provides our congregations with the opportunity to express their joy for what God has done for them. This prepares the heart for the preaching of God’s Word, and makes us cognizant of God’s blessing in our lives. It also prepares us for eternity, for we know that there will be singing in heaven. There is so much we can do to improve our congregation’s desire to honor the Lord through song. ■

—Taken from *The Battle for Christian Music* by Tim Fisher. © 1992 Sacred Music Services. Reprinted with permission of the author.

On Worship in Relation to Doctrine

by Aaron Lapp

“Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men” (Mark 7:7).

The burden of this article is to note the contemporary changes in worship as they relate to doctrine. People and churches change their practice, then they change their doctrine, and after that they change their worship program. One of the peripheral changes that comes with the shift in doctrine is an alteration in worship style. The correlation made by Jesus in our text verse is an interesting one.

The most beautiful aspect of church worship is singing. The beautiful four-part a capella singing in our Beachy Amish churches was introduced in the 1950s when we started local Christian day schools. From there it was picked up by the young people and in the 1960s by our church when we changed to the English language and the use of Mennonite-prepared hymnals for church services. Songs from these hymnals espouse doctrine. A broad front of Bible doctrine gained ground among us with the use of these great songs of the church, which we learned from the Mennonites, who in turn learned them fifty to sixty years earlier from fundamental Protestants. Actually, most of the songs in various Mennonite hymnbooks were written by non-Mennonites.

The beautiful singing feature of the saints in holy worship has been strong-armed by the music department in some churches. The worship team approach with contemporary music in Sunday morning services has become firmly entrenched far and wide. It has taken over as the anchor feature of the church. It has become the peer pressure point

among some churches. It has become the driving force behind the competition for membership growth.

Our text in Mark 7:7 relates worship to doctrine. Note carefully what it says: “Howbeit, in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men.” God’s doctrine is by divine inspiration as it comes *down from God*. Man’s response in worship is offering *up to God* the heart’s affection. The vast distance between a holy God and redeemed man is bridged in Jesus Christ.

How the doctrine from God is recognized by man will extensively sway man’s thinking in responding to God in worship. A teachable recognition will effect a resigned and free response. A corrupted vacillation often weakens the conscience and proceeds toward contemporary preferences.

Doctrine is generally considered to be fixed teachings of unchanging principles. The folks back in Jesus’ day had tampered with doctrine to the point where it expressed the preferences of an elite class. It so happened that these teachers were also the ruling group. Their interpretations of Scripture were far removed from God’s intent. Consequently, their lives were misled with false justifications to the extent that their worship was not acceptable. And Jesus told them so. Jesus and the apostles already contended way back then with those who had a pseudo-faith, who had devious doctrines, and a wayward worship.

Church doctrine ranges on a scale from A to Z. Worship fluctuates likewise. Compromising on Bible doctrine causes compromises in worship. Is it possible that what passes for worship among men does not even reach God? When the doc-

trine of God is sidelined, the resulting worship is vain.

An appreciation for Bible doctrine has fallen on hard times in many quarters. When doctrine is shoved out, something else is pulled in to take its place. General deportment and specific practices change. Distinctive identification changes. Emphasis changes. Core values change. Lifestyles change. Sunday worship will then gradually change.

It has been thought by some that doctrine is changed first and then lifestyle follows. No, first lifestyle changes and then the tenets of doctrine for the church are adjusted to fit. The altering of doctrine will allow for the altering of worship style in the church. First a change in people's practice, second a change in the church's doctrine, third a change in the church's worship style.

Don't fault Bible doctrine. It is without error. Bible doctrine is good, and for our good. It is noble, and when implemented in life, produces nobility. Bible doctrine is appropriately known as holy oracles, and blesses all those who live it with a holiness acceptable to our holy God. Adherence to doctrine always has ascending qualities about it.

And don't fault church doctrine. Church doctrine and Bible doctrine do not always say the same thing. Church doctrine is not primarily to blame. Usually it is the practice of church people that forces church doctrine to change. The ecclesiastical apparatus of some church bodies and clever study groups find ingenious ways to bend Bible doctrine to suit church doctrine. A faithful church will seek to do it the other way around.

People change wrongly and then seek to change Bible teaching accordingly. This was the burden of Jesus when He originally gave this text, prefacing it with an apt quote from Isaiah, "This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me" (Mark 7:6).

Man's problem continually has to do with distance. How can we draw near to

God? Somehow, it is realized that the greatest sense of nearness to God comes through worshiping Him. Jesus clearly stated that true worship is accomplished in one's spirit. Our spirit is the medium for nearness to God. But how we regard God's declarations is really the primary element in the efficacy of our worship.

What, then, remains for one whose spirit is not right with God? Well, there are always the emotions; they happily respond to stimulation. Bring in the performers. Increase the tempo. Turn up the volume. The worship team will get results that preaching can never match. Mission accomplished. Emotions get turned on even if the spirit is wayward.

In the relationship of worship to doctrine, the larger text of Mark 7:6 gives rise to three points on principles that are often present when one's spirit is not inclined to God.

1. The Reduction Principle

"Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Doctrine is *reduced* to man's commandments, bringing it down to acceptable levels. It takes one from what God says to what man says. It is a "creative experiment." It is a "visionary innovation." The change-over happens as church music replaces the centrality of preaching. As the worship team displaces the ministerial team time-wise, in sound effects, and in stage hoopla, an unprecedented phenomena takes place: attendance numbers increase. Meanwhile, there is a sinister reduction taking place. The commandments of men come in the front door. Slowly, but without regret by the masses, certain Bible doctrines go out the back door. Oh, there are a few old timers who question and protest, but it is too small and too late.

2. The Replacement Principle

"For *laying aside* the commandments of God, ye hold the tradition of men . . ." (Mark 7:8). Man's attempt at *reducing*

Bible doctrine really has behind it the idea that with time (sooner rather than later if at all possible) these nuisance doctrines can be not only reduced, but happily replaced. That, in particular, is the idea in Jesus' words of warning about "laying aside" God's doctrines in a trade-off to men's commandments. How often have we seen and heard of the original and established doctrines being laid in their grave, and precious few come to the funeral to mourn?

The *replacement* activity can be administered more smoothly when carried out on the emotional level. Going from *reduction* to *replacement*, everyone's interest and concern can be expressed. But only one movement will be recognized and validated: the flow that points toward replacing doctrine with the commandments of men. And what better way to do it than with voting. A little grassroots opinion here and a little campaigning and church politicking there, and next thing you know, it is done. Surely, a church majority could not be wrong.

With the regular Sunday morning music on the emotional level and a major share of a shorter and shorter sermon on that same level, it really should not take long to make some palatable changes on this doctrine thing. The "laying aside" concept by our Lord has the idea of planned action with specious intent. Not in bad taste, of course. Nor quickly, nor all at once, shall the "laying aside" program be done, lest the replacement agenda be resisted and prematurely derailed.

3. The Rejection Principle

"And he said unto them, Full well ye *reject* the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition" (Mark 7:9). The religious arena has showcased the departure from God by His own people and highlighted the ensuing distance from God. It goes all the way back to Jesus' days on earth. The steps (or is it a slide?) are identifiable as beginning with

doctrinal *reduction*, then doctrinal *replacement* and, in the due course of time, the inevitable *rejection* of doctrine itself with a notable finality.

Departure from the faith is not done in one gigantic church council leap over the precipice of doctrinal high ground. Paul wrote to Timothy, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall *depart* from the faith, and *give heed* to seducing spirits . . ." (1 Timothy 4:1). The German gives a distinct word picture ". . . von dem glauben *abtreten* und *anhangen* . . .," transliterated back to English, ". . . from the faith *step away* and *hang unto*" as a calculated act. It has the idea of letting go of one thing, stepping over, as over a prescribed line, and there hanging to something else.

The slide is downward, and as it progresses it seems to pick up speed. The identifiable marks are there—*reduction*, *replacement*, and finally *rejection*. The effect approaches an act of treason against God and the trust given to the church. It almost seems at times as though the intent is to sabotage God's program through doctrinal slippage. Intended or not, the relation of a congregation's mindset to doctrine unmistakably affects her conformation in worship.

One more thing here: Institutions seldom change back to the historic good by which they were previously known. Experiment usually sets precedent. Precedent soon gives motion to organizational wheels. Those wheels don't turn around and go back to earlier orthodoxy. Samuel told the children of Israel they sinned greatly in asking for a king, actually on insisting on it. They were waylaid by great fear. Instead of repenting and returning to a theocracy, they asked Samuel to pray for them as though it was some charm to ward off evil. Samuel responds with saying his teaching and their obedience to it is more important than his prayers for them. (See 1 Samuel 12:16-25.)

Some people feel, and with righteous reason, that worship teams with in-church contemporary music are hijacking the erstwhile faithful church. Let's be wise and not permit it in our homes and conveyances. *Reduction* of doctrine can eventually lead to outright *rejection*. Jesus clearly said, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him; the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). The words *judge* and *judgment* always carry the idea of condemnation, according to its original usage.

Worship can never make up for a failed faith or for faulty doctrine. The soul can come on strong, but it can never make up for a severed spirit with the Lord God, not even in any kind of worship. Our text clearly implies that God doesn't oblige Himself to any kind of worship.

True worship that is acceptable to God, the kind that overcomes this distance from God, is the worship that is enjoined faithfully and obediently and

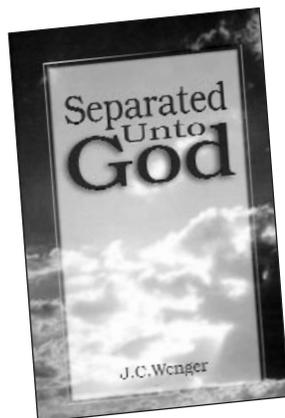
uncompromisingly to the doctrines of God's Word, being made one with Him through Jesus Christ and His Spirit. While many seem to be turning to mammon, music, and merriment, there are also some who will not bend to these distractions. We are called of God to be a people with full-orbed faith, a disciplined deference to doctrine, and a worship suited to extolling the wonder of God's grace.

Orderliness in one's Christian life gives ample room for God's doctrine to easily occupy supremacy over all else, coming down from God to man. Worship is the heart's response to God and His Word. This goes up from man to God. Faith and works are the practical result of being in touch with God, but its primary expression and experience is man to man.

And now abideth doctrine, faith, and worship, these three and in that order. The greatest of these is doctrine as it centers in Jesus Christ. All else seems to flow from that Divine Center. ■

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by J. C. Wenger



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