

MODERN WORSHIP

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Christian worship today now employs pop-music, dance, personal testimonies and worldly methods. Such styles are also used in evangelism and outreach.

It is claimed that we must move with the times to attract people to church and that every church should have social activities with young people playing guitars and drums and new worship songs. There should be dancing, clapping, disco lights, lifting of hands, speaking in tongues and personal testimonies in which people recount their dreadful lives before conversion and tell us what the Lord has done. Prayer, preaching and the study of the Bible is not given the importance it must have and worship has to be self-expression, that is to say in accordance with each individual's feelings. That the Bible takes a different stand is ignored.

Faith does not come from any of these things. Romans 10 states that faith comes from hearing the Word of God. 1 Corinthians 1. 21ff states that it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching that people believe and are saved.

When the Lord was here, His preaching and witness used straight forward speaking with factual and uncomplicated appeal. The apostle did the same. In witness and worship we must work lawfully (2 Timothy 2.5).

By what authority or right do we have to turn the Gospel into entertainment and use worldly music? Is it Biblically lawful and acceptable? What does God require?

There is no Biblical authority for this entertainment and modern worship. The Christian life is serious but not a miserable experience and it is absurd to use modern methods such as pop music, dance and entertainment. It is unnatural and unsuitable and even common sense should deter us from this.

These methods are rejected in other organisations where important issues are being considered.

Can you imagine the Prime Minister and his cabinet discussing a serious matter with pop music and the convulsive head-tossing and hip gyrations of a vocalist with red and green flashing lights. It would make the serious matter trivial and the inappropriate presentation would be laughable.

Come to a university lecture where the speaker is singing and playing the drums with flashing lights and a backing groups singing Yeah, yeah, yeah. This idea is bizarre and utterly ridiculous and totally unnatural.

Here is the President of the USA warning about the nuclear threat and the potential high cost of life and that millions will die. But he is singing his message with a noisy pop group in the background or a film of an American football game.

The preaching of the Gospel is to encourage people to turn to the Lord Jesus and be saved so that they might have eternal life. It is a serious issue.

You go to the doctor only to discover that you have terminal cancer and have only months to live. In telling you, he is doing a modern dance singing a pop song and clapping merrily.

It is unthinkable.

We have to present the most serious message of all and we must do it in an appropriate way.

What must be remembered is that entertainment is entertainment and while in some circumstances it is enjoyed, it is not really taken seriously. Entertainment worship has been proved to have no lasting effect on attendees and moral demands.

The New Testament requires a pure, clear, forthright, intelligent and persuasive presentation of the character and love of God and the saving death of Christ. It must be spiritual and not worldly or secular. The Holy Spirit must do His work and He does not need a supporting cast.

It has also been shown that modern worship very rarely produces humbling of the soul or the conviction of that soul needing Christ. But they have to hear of the consequences of sin, death, hell and judgement and to realise the dying agonies of the One who died to save them.

Gimmicks do not save. The faithful preaching of the Gospel does. These issues are not entertainment and must not be degraded as extras.

It is the flesh, the carnal part of man, that wants something extra just as the wayward church at Corinth wanted extras. Yet Paul wrote to them saying, My speech and my preaching was not with the enticing sounds of a man's current music, but in demonstration of the Spirit and His power.

We must service the Lord worthily.

One of the worrying aspects of modern worship is the emphasis of what the individual has done, personal pride and exhibitionism.

Here is a young fellow who says, I've written a new song to praise the Lord and you have all got to come and hear it!"

And a young lady who gets up to give her testimony and says that before she found the Lord she was a prostitute and would have sex with any man if the price was right ; how she was a drug addict and how low she got with self harm and attempts at suicide.

First of all, it was the Lord who found her. And the scriptures clearly teach that when you are saved you are a new creation and you do not speak of your sinful past.

I was present at one of those group meetings in which the Pentecostal pastor asked the group one by one to tell what they have done for the Lord. One boasted that he gave out tracts in the main square every Saturday morning; another said she visited old peoples homes to witness to them and how the old dears loved her; a young fellow said he was going to Bible College but it had to be 'with it' and not a stuffy Biblical one; another said that she was speaking in tongues daily (more rounds of applause and cheers); some one said that they were giving £10 a month to a missionary cause and so on.

The pastor came to the last one in the group and persuaded him to make a comment. The young man said, "I have realised what the Lord has done for me and I am truly grateful". There was a deadly silence and the others looked at him with strange expressions.

In all Christian things, it is the Lord that must have the glory. There are many Scriptures to this end. 2 Corinthians 4.5 For we have not heralded ourselves but Christ as Lord. He must increase and I must decrease (John 3. 30). No flesh should glory in His Presence (1 Corinthians 1.29), God had said, My glory will I not give to another (Isaiah 42. 8). The apostle Paul said that we must nor boast but only boast in the glory of the Lord Jesus. He also said, We preach not ourselves but Christ and Him crucified and that is another deterrent to personal testimonies. Paul wrote to the Colossians (1. 18) that in all things Christ is to have the pre-eminence. Note in ALL things.

O Jesus Christ, grow Thou in me,
And all things else recede.
My heart be daily nearer Thee
From sin be daily freed.

Guy King, the one time godly vicar of Christchurch in Beckenham, commented on the verses where God says, Thy sins and iniquities will I remember no more. I have cast them into the depths of the sea (Hebrews 10.27). Guy King then said, with his wonderful humour, "And God puts up a notice... No fishing!"

What God has dealt with and forgiven must not be brought up again. Testimonies refer to the sinful past but it is the forgiven past and is not to be recalled (Galatians 2. 18).

Modern worship is full of exhibitionism.

It is secular and worldly. Performers draw attention to themselves, earn applause and press for adulation. They are puffed up, proud and exhibitionists.

James 4. 6 states that God resisteth the proud but gives grace to the humble. If the ego is important, if we are admiring ourselves, hoping to be both noticed and applauded, then God will resist us. He will not bless our witness. He will deal with us as He did with Cain who was also proud.

In worship or any Christian activity, individualism must not only recede but go.

It will be said that some Christians have talent. This may be so. But must our talents be used in that which is spiritual and in worship?

2 Timothy 3. 2ff tells us that we must not be lovers of self, proud, boasters, lovers of pleasure (which would include entertainment) more than being lovers of God.

In the so-called Magnificat (Luke 2. 52) we read that God hath put down the mighty from their seats and exalted them of low degree.

Leith Samuel of Above Bar Church, Southampton, used to say, If you are full of self you cannot be full of the Spirit. By being full of the Spirit he was not referring to anything charismatic or Pentecostal but the true meaning of both nearness to God and to the Lord Jesus which is what fellowship is.

1 John 2.15 tells us that we are not to love the world or anything in it. Pop music is of the world as is modern dance. We are in the world but not of the world (John 17.14)

Christians are to be different. We are to set our affection on things above and not on the things of the earth (Colossians 3.2). James 4.4 seems to say that friendship with the world is enmity against God. Worldliness, or the love of the things of the world, is a form of spiritual adultery. If we prefer the things of the world, its fashions and style, its amusements and pleasures more than God or the Lord then there is something wrong. Romans 12.2 tells us, Be not conformed to this world... but be transformed so that ye may prove what is good and acceptable to the Will of God.

The Lord Jesus in John 7.7 says that the works of the world are evil and that true believers are not of this world (John 17. 14ff). Paul writes in 2 Corinthians that if any man be in Christ (that is to say a Christian) he is a new creature; old things are passed again (such as the sinful past); behold all things are become new.

Even more potent is what is said in Galatians 1. 4, Our Saviour gave Himself for us that He might

deliver us from this present evil world. But modern worship ignores all this to stay with the fashions of the day.

I was asked to speak at a charismatic meeting and the pastor talked about the BBC soap opera Eastenders and enquired of me about this show. I said that I had never watched the programme and the company said, "Everybody watches Eastenders!" I was thereafter treated with total disdain. I did not know that Eastenders was essential viewing for Christians!

It is correct to say that worldly methods produce worldly results. Pentecostals and charismatic seem to hate foundational truths or fundamentalism.

To the very sinful church in Corinth, Paul wrote, Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, every man's work shall be made manifest for the day shall declare it and the fire shall try every man's work as to what is it. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss but he himself will be saved (1 Corinthians 3. 12ff).

There are many churches and Christian meetings built with wood, hay and stubble and we are taught to take heed how we build.

From Creation, the principle has been established that creatures beget their own kind (Genesis 1. 24ff). What is clear that pop Christians and the modern church rarely forsake the world. There will be some exceptions, of course.

What is disconcerting is that some churches who were sound in doctrine and practice have now taken on modern worship. I went to one church after not being there for twenty years when it was full to people of all ages and the Gospel was preached and there was edifying Bible study. Now they occasionally have a traditional hymn all jazzed up to a very fast tempo with off beat drum work and so loud that it is pointless anyone singing. And the congregation is very small and hardly any teenagers. This flies in the face of the claim that you have to be up to date to get the youngsters in.

It is many of the big city churches that this modern worship is found. I know six London churches who were very Biblical some years ago and then ecumenicalism and modernism took over. For a few years these churches were full with young people, pop group music, dance, self expression and the like. It was a short-live novelty. These churches have declined in numbers and the majority who remain in these churches are loyal older people who endured the few years of modernism.

Worldly methods produce worldly results and they do not last. Pupils at my school would say that a pop song was old fashioned if it were six months old.

James 1.27 says that true religion is keeping ourselves unspotted by the world.

Another thing about modern worship churches is not only their lack of dependence on the Bible but their general disregard for the poor and needy. In the assembly I was in, we had a Saturday teatime when anyone could come in, free of charge, for tea, coffee, sandwiches and cake. We did not preach to them but showed kindness without asking any personal questions. We did tell them the times of our Sunday services but there was no pressure put on them whatsoever. The Lord Jesus said, Inasmuch as ye have done this to the least of my brethren ye have done it unto Me (Matthew 25. 40)

The apostle John says, Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. 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)

Worldly methods do not produce decency and morality. I went to a meeting of an extreme charismatic

gathering at the end of which the bar was open for alcoholic drinks. I walked home through Hyde Park and two young people who said that they were believers rededicated their lives to Christ at this meeting with rapturous applause. Now they were in Hyde Park having sex while we walked by.

I am sorry to recount this incident since it will offend many but it happened.

This was the blend of the spiritual with the flesh.

The very wayward church at Corinth made some progress so that the second epistle is more conciliatory. In 2 Corinthians 4. 1ff we read, Engaged, therefore, in this service under Divine mercy such as we have experienced, we are not despondent, but we do eliminate underhanded ways of which one should be ashamed. We do not behave cunningly nor do we falsify the Word of God but by clear announcement of the Truth we commend ourselves in divine presence to every human conscience. (This is from the unfamiliar Berkeley translation.)

There is also deception in modern worship. A famous and well-liked singer is advertised and so people come only to hear him but are preached at during the concert. We must never bait people to come to church or any other meeting. The Biblical metaphor is that the ox and the ass must not be yoked together. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (Matthew 6.24).

David Pawson has said that only young people have the right ideas about God and Jesus Christ. He is a charismatic with ideas contrary to the New Testament.

In the entertainment modern worship there are also jokes many of which are in poor taste. A Pentecostal minister in Bradford in a televised service said, "I am 54 and not yet potty trained." I could quote others but they are rude, uncouth and insulting.

Again this account is offensive but it does show what rubbish some so-called Christian ministers speak.

The Gospel must never be associated with schemes of appeasement for the pleasure of this generation. Christian truth must never be in second place to another attraction.

Ernest Lloyd of the Christian Witness to Israel flew half way round the world to speak at a meeting in South Africa. He arrived at 7.30 and there was 50 minutes of singing choruses and jingles. Then someone gave their testimony about her prostitution and how she was stripped naked and had to run through the town and she also spoke of other disturbing things. Then Ernest was told to speak but that he had only five minutes. The police arrived saying that they had had numerous complaints of the noise and disturbing the peace in this church and some arrests were made.

Modern and worldly worship!

Worship must be in Spirit and in truth (John 4. 24). This means that all prayer, praise and worship must be sincere and intelligent. And it must be in accordance with God's requirements not our self-expression.

It must be reverent with godly fear that is to say respect. (Hebrews 2.28). Isaiah 30. 15 says that in quietness and in confidence is our strength. Matthew 12. 6 states that we are to reverence the Son. So much of modern worship is noisy but God speaks in a still small voice (1 Kings 19.12). God is not deaf.

Praise is thanksgiving and when we realise what the Lord has done it humbles us. It does not show itself in jumping up and down, hands in the air and speaking gibberish or dancing around.

Can you imagine the holy Son of God doing this such as singing one of the inane modern songs and banging on a drum kit and getting up and dancing and asking for the red and green disco lights to be put on and prancing around saying Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! over and over again.

In some modern churches you have a worship leader who introduces songs. I cannot see the point of this because the Holy Spirit leads us into worship and we do not need a human being to take charge when the Spirit is, of course, far more able.

(You should read my essay [*Songs of Fellowship*](#))

Some fellowships do not employ musical instruments but sing unaccompanied. There is never a legitimate excuse for saying, I worship God with my music or Playing the drums is my means of worship.

Worship is for God alone and we should all seek a direct communication with God as opposed to a corporate one. It is our personal relationship that matters and while fellowship with fellow believers is important, in the last analysis it is how we are personally with God and the Lord Jesus. When we come to pass through death and see the Lord we do it alone and other believers may pray and be supportive but it is our journey. It is our private life with the Lord that matters most.

Pop music and modern worship is the usurper of true worship and in violation of the principles set down by the Saviour.

There are New Testament truths which are not honoured by some modern churches. Paul says that women must not speak in church and must have their heads covered and that elders/ bishops must be the husband of one wife and so an elder cannot be a woman. Many Pentecostals insist that the full gospel or the complete Gospel is when you speak in tongues which is a practise that the wayward church at Corinth proclaimed and yet Paul asks the rhetoric question, Do all speak in tongues? If everyone did, or had to, he would not have asked that question.

I have a very dear friend who was baptised in the Biblical way by immersion in a London Pentecostal church but she was thereafter told that she was not saved and would not go to Heaven because she had not spoken in tongues. Years later, she went to an Elim church and was told off for not dancing to the hymns as dance was an essential part of worship.

(Read my essay on David, a man after God's own heart which deals with the matter of dance),

It would be wrong of me to even imply that all pop groups are into drugs, sex, unnatural rebellion, lawlessness, indulgences and products of a violent age. The term rock 'n' roll is a sexual term and much pop music was conceived to be deliberate rebellion against decency and moral standards. The senses of young people were and are being bombarded with arousal of sexual feeling and independence from good standards blotting out reason and accountability, self-control and advocating free love and denying what is spiritual. I could quote the name of groups and set out the lyrics of some songs to prove my point. There are groups who recommend drugs, sexual liberation and rebellion. Many people, mainly teenage girls, worshipped their pop idols. Many girls wore suggestive clothes and in public performances of their favourite group took off their knickers and threw them on to the stage.

The 1960s saw the introduction of the mini skirt and an epidemic of unwanted teenage pregnancies. Some of the pop songs were sexually explicit.

We could quote 1 Corinthians 10.5, With many of these things God was not pleased.

I remember reading a teenage magazine in which a girl of 12 wrote to an agony aunt to say she was in

love with a pop singer who lived in her town and wanted him. The agony aunt said find him in the pub and go into the toilets with him, show him what you have got and make love to him.

Again I could apologise for this offensive story but this is the world we live in and, as Christians, are not to be a part of it. This world is evil.

It is playing with sin. Christians must not have any association with evil.

The New Testament teaches that we can kiss the brethren with a holy kiss and, as the custom in the Middle East, this is one man to another. In some modern churches there is kissing and embracing those of the opposite sex and that is forbidden (1 Corinthians 7). It has led to fornication, affairs and divorces.

I am shocked that many pastors who claim to know their Bible do not adhere to these and other instructions as set out here.

But you may say that modern worship is not that bad. We have to move with the times and be in with modern fashions and this can be done without it having an effect on our lives as Christians.

When Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians he had to deal with their idolatry, the feasts and celebrations of pagan festivals (which could be akin to pop music and modern worship). They went along with pagan worship and also said that they were Christians. They sought personal glory and applause with their alleged gifts. They craved after the modern life style.

The modern church is revived Corinthianism.

It only remains to comment on what worship is and our motives. The motive is to honour God and the Lord Jesus and to bring glory to Him, to extol Him and praise Him in the sincerity of our own hearts and lives. In all things Christ must have the pre-eminence, no one else. We must decrease and He must increase.

Make this poor self grow less and less
Be Thou my life and aim.
O make me daily through Thy grace
More meet to bear Thy Name.

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