

Overcoming the Present Apostasy (4)
How do we view the Local Church?
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Introduction: There is a revolution going on in the denominational world.

- A. There is a movement that is centered in “vineyard churches” that claim to break the “traditions” of the past and make “worship” the focus of the assemblies.
 - 1. When this movement speaks of “worship” they mean specialized teams of singers and performers. Choirs, bands and plays make up most of what is done in these groups. Surveys are taken to find out what men desire.
 - 2. I was listening to a denominational broadcast this week where an older preacher talked about the beginning of this movement and how it become the norm.
 - a. He saw that the songs shifted from an emphasis of the nature of God and approaching Him to an expression of how the “worshipper” felt!
 - b. He maintained that most of the songs were very shallow at best.
 - c. The “preaching” was limited to a very short talk of little Bible depth.
 - 3. Today most churches now have separate services for “traditional” and “contemporary” worship. The house church movement imbibes this spirit also.
- B. There have been several “house churches” in recent years begin from faithful churches.
 - 1. The appeal of these groups is a man centered pride filled spirit.
 - 2. In Bowling Green Kentucky several FC students have been pulled into the movement. Churches have also started in Alabama.
 - 3. These groups observe the Lord’s Supper as a meal.

I. Worship is to be given to God!

- A. Worship must be God centered, not man centered.
 - 1. We need to be asking the question: “What does God really want?” The answer is: “Our Hearts!” (**Micah 6:6-8**)
 - 2. We become like what we worship. (**Psa 115:4-8; Psa 135:15-18**)
 - 3. Sadly men are encouraged to “shop” for churches like you would for clothes or a restaurant. Our only goal is to seek God. (**Heb 11:6**)
 - B. God has designed worship as the primary means of keeping our hearts right!
 - 1. Could we come to services and the end result be worse for us? (**1 Cor 11:17**)
 - 2. What does God see and think about our worship? (**1 Cor 11:27-31**)
 - 3. Occasionally I hear of a brother who had great Bible knowledge who fell into a web of sin. How did that happen? First look to his worship.
- “Worship renews the spirit as sleep renews the body.” - Richard Cabot
- C. We must have a worship that looks upon God and exposes our hearts! (**Heb 4:12-13**)
 - 1. What do you think of when approaching God in prayer? The Lord's supper? Singing? Bible Study? (**Mt 15:8-9**)
 - 2. Proper worship tests the heart! (**1 Cor 14:24-25**)
 - 3. Many people try to stay busy and avoid their conscious. These people do not like to be alone with God! This is why a neglect of worship will lead to an

indifferent hardness.

II. Are the “non-traditional” worship services in harmony with God’s will?

A. Does the Bible approve of singing groups or “worship teams?”

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

B. Does the Bible approve of plays and drama performances?

1. What is the purpose of a play?
 - a. In our society plays are dependant upon good writing and good acting.
 - b. A class may use role playing as a teaching tool. Here the ones participating gain the benefit.
2. We need to think these things over very carefully.

C. Does the Bible approve of applauding as a sign of approval?

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

in a carnal way.

c. If we can clap with our hands could we not also use drums?

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

(THE CONFORMED CHURCH OF CHRIST?, Richard Guill, Seek the Old Paths)

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

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

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

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

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

“.... Full of himself, Shipp made joke after joke while relating a string of personal experiences and saying the Holy Spirit delayed a man's flight in Oklahoma City so Shipp could talk with him. The climax of his clown-act in this three-ring liberal circus was the evening he had the audience "give God a standing ovation." Like sheep plunging into a canyon after a blind leader, the audience arose and clapped for God -- all except those of us from Arapaho, Oklahoma.” - (Baling Up The Liberals, Jerry C. Brewer - Seek the Old Paths)

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

Conclusion: Who are we trying to please?

A. If it is the applause of men, then it will be the only reward we will receive.

1. Jesus noted that this attitude was common! (**Matt 6:2, 5, 16, 18**)
2. Why are you here? (Illus. A young girl's piano recital)

B. Brethren let us humbly bow ourselves before God so that we may clearly see.

Are You Tired of All the Gimmicks?

Frank Himmel

People should be insulted by all the gimmicks that churches are offering to draw and to keep them. Most of it is directed toward families, the children in particular. I speak of all the secular, non-religious, non-spiritual gimmicks -- the picnics, luncheons and suppers, the parties, the sports teams, the fun and games, the square dances, the clubs and socials, the diet and exercise classes, and the fund-raising dinners and bazaars offered by churches. Classes and services that used to be purely religious are given new appearances with gimmickry.

Don't the people realize that the churches are saying, in effect, "We know that purely spiritual or religious activities and services, involving worshipping God, teaching and learning His word, edifying and being edified spiritually, are not enough to draw and to keep you. So we are featuring all these other secular activities in which you are probably more interested and adding a little religion to them and calling them 'Christian fellowship.' We are willing to compromise to get our crowd."?

So churches cease to be churches and become more like social, recreational, athletic, health, craft clubs. The Church of Christ is still a church, and we do not resort to gimmickry. We are trying to be like the churches you read about in the New Testament, not the churches around us.

The Work of the Church

Christians have God-given work to do, both individually and collectively. While there is much overlap, passages such as **1 Timothy 5:16** clearly indicate a difference between the two. What does the Bible teach about our collective work?

Spiritual

The Bible teaches that God ordained specific tasks for churches to perform. First-century congregations:

- (1) Preached the gospel at home and abroad (**1 Th. 1:8**). This was done through instruction given in worship assemblies (**1 Cor. 14:24-25**), by people talking to those with whom they had contact (**Acts 8:4**), and by sending men out to preach (**Ph. 4:15 -16**).
- (2) Built up the members of the congregation. Everything done in worship was to be unto edification (**1 Cor. 14:26**). Elders, spiritual shepherds, were charged with feeding the flock (**Acts 20:28**). Even severing association was an act of seeking to restore the erring (**1 Cor. 5**).
- (3) Provided for needy brethren, either at home (**Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35**) or abroad (**1 Cor. 16:1-2; Rom. 15:26**). This third area, unlike the others, was not necessarily ongoing, but as needed. Since the church is a spiritual relationship, it is no surprise that its work is in the spiritual realm. So much of what modern churches do is conspicuously absent from the pages of the New Testament. The Bible makes no reference to churches operating schools or day care centers, providing recreational facilities and opportunities, being in the health care business, being a source for counseling and all sorts of social services, or even being a general charity. The fact that something seems like a good thing to us is no justification for altering God's plan. Neither do we have any right to employ carnal means to attract more people. See John 6 for the result.

Equipped

The Bible teaches that Christ equipped the church to accomplish everything He wants it to do. "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ" (**Eph. 4:11-12**).

God's provisions are simple, yet sufficient. It is only when we try to involve the church in an unauthorized activity that we find our resources or organization inadequate. Make no mistake: any argument that says we must go beyond the New Testament model for churches in order to be effective is a denial of the sufficiency of God's design!

Independent

The Bible teaches that each church governs itself, planning and executing its own work in keeping with Christ's directions. Elders' oversight is limited to the flock among them (1 Pet. 5:2). No New Testament church ever directed the work of another, wholly or in part. None ever planned a work beyond its ability to carry out. Each did what it could.

No New Testament church ever paid a human institution to do its work for it. There were no add-on organizations, no subsidiary "ministries," no missionary boards or societies.

Let us be busy doing God's work in God's way.