

CONSUMER WORSHIP

By

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Jesus said that all who worship God “must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). God reveals Himself in truth and where truth is absent worship is pagan.

The truth brings one to God. It focuses the mind on God, His being, His goodness, justice, mercy and His love. The truth exposes one to God’s purpose: His purpose in creating man, in redeeming him and in man’s ultimate resurrection to eternal life. Worship should be guided by and directed to these very truths of God.

A disaster of our times is the fact that worship has become “consumer” oriented. The faith has become a commodity. The church and salvation are sold by the same techniques used to sell lipstick and automobiles. The church has become an entertainment center and the pulpit a stage where talented speakers and singers may bask in the applause of their fans. Advertisements for Sunday services appeal to the public’s craving for excitement and entertainment rather than its need for humility and holiness.

Another means of “selling” the church is the promise to “meet one’s needs.” It is advertised as the place where you can find a good feeling, meet your kind of people, get all your problems solved and where you will receive a tailor-made blessing.

The church that attracts people on the basis of satisfying all their human needs is very likely to fail to meet the one greatest need of their lives. Jesus came to seek and save sinners, but multitudes of them turned away from Him, because they had other needs they wanted to satisfy rather than the one He recognized.

The church does meet genuine needs when it is obedient to the commandments of the Lord. However, this doesn’t mean that all the problems of life will be solved. The apostle Paul faced serious problems throughout his ministry and yet faithfully served God in spite of them. There were times he had every kind of feeling except a *good* feeling, and the treatment he often received could hardly be described as a blessing. One wonders if Paul would recognize the church at all from many of the advertisements announcing modern day worship services.

Some churches build the worship service around personalities such as some athlete, theatrical performer or maybe their own popular preacher. For many it is easier to adore and exalt the flesh and blood person they can relate to with their senses than it is to worship the Invisible God.

One of the purposes for meeting with the saints in assembly is fellowship, to share, to see what we can do to build up one another in the faith. In this, also, we have become self-centered, thinking, “*What is the church doing for me?*” Rather we should ask, “*How can I help my brother or sister today?*” So the apostle wrote that in our assembly we are to edify one another. Instead, we come to see if the preacher can stir us with a clever or challenging sermon. People often go away thinking of the performance of the preacher and the musicians, when they ought to be thinking of their own relationship to God and how well they are performing for Him. The program too often is designed to provide what people demand, rather than being built around the Lord and

what He demands. The question upon leaving after worship should not be, “Did I enjoy the service?” but, “Did I meet God?”

I have been attending church for many years, most of the time as a preacher, and, needless to say, I have grown quite accustomed to the general worship format. Having done a great deal of singing myself, I enjoy hearing beautiful music that glorifies God. I am accustomed to a worship service that is orderly and runs smoothly. I like sermons that are enlightening or challenging, not too long, and easy to listen to. Like many preachers I have struggled to try to make the worship hour as meaningful as possible and to engage as many people as I can in true worship. I know that traditions of worship are the deepest ruts one may get into and the hardest to climb out of. Yet, somehow, we must try to eliminate the practice of consumer worship. We must resist the tendency for the preacher and singers to be performers and the worshippers to be spectators. He is the audience at every worship service. The people are the performers, doing the worshipping, and the preacher is no more than the prompter behind the scenes, helping people in their performance for God.

This idea may not get very far because too many people like being entertained better than they do real spiritual and mental exercise required to worship in spirit and truth, and too many preachers and singers like the idea of being on stage, although they may not consciously realize it.

All who are concerned with pleasing God rather than in pleasing men might do well to begin to examine the whole popular concept of consumer worship and “selling” the church. Instead of following examples of the world in selling its commodities, we should get our lessons from the early church. They were not always popular, but Christ was always the central figure.

Modern churches and the “clergy” have made a great mistake in trying to “turn people on” to Christ and the gospel through humanistic techniques. The policy has been to use all the techniques known to modern society in order to get people to God. (As if God needed any of that to accomplish His purpose.) All the time that is actually required is the truth He has revealed, that we may worship Him in spirit and truth.

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