

Worshipping Sacred Cows of Worship

Concerns about Trends from a Worshipping Charismatic Minister

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Some are Unable to Listen

We live in a time when worship and worshipping have become “sacred cows” to many charismatic Christians. Some are unable to discern weaknesses in current thought and practice in worship or even discuss what might need adjustment because of emotional attachment to these particular truths above all others. Some simply reject any possibility that something could need adjustment by rejecting those offering insights. These insights are not given a hearing by thinking that the people offering them must not have the current “revelation” about worship like they do. It is an arrogant and proud way to avoid truth or adjustment.

Because of popular and widespread teaching that has placed emphasis on this one truth, many today do seem to worship worship. The act of worshipping has become more important to some than the One who is being worshipped or even fulfilling Christ’s Great Commission. Some seem to be unable to discern or draw distinctions between truth about worship and encouragements to worship that are not really true in a biblical sense.

Worship as the Answer to All Things

While worship is an important truth that needs to be taught in the Church, it has been over-taught in America for three decades while some other important truths have been neglected such as personal evangelism. Some have been influenced into waiting for some unspecified future phenomena of worship to solve the multiple ills of the Church. These ideas have come by virtue of some popular “revelation” about worship and the future of the Church. As a result, some think that worship is the all-encompassing answer to all the ills of the churches and this includes reaching the unsaved. Indeed this emphasis has been with us who are “charismatic” for three decades. During those decades, some unbiblical promises have been attached to worship by virtue of special “revelations”. For instance, the thought that the unsaved multitudes would flock to the churches to be saved when worship reached some unspecified height and anointing has been a common “revelation”.

There is hardly a church anywhere in America that doesn’t have what appears to be striking improvement in their worship in the past two decades. Yet the statistics show that the American Church is actually reaching fewer lost people than ever before in its history. The current research shows specifically that those churches that have an emphasis on worship, intercession and spiritual warfare are no more effective in reaching the lost than those churches that have no emphasis on these things. However, those churches

that have an emphasis on equipping for evangelism and personal witness reach the lost fairly effectively. This is no surprise since the Bible declares clearly that sharing the simple Gospel about Christ and not worship is what reaches the lost.

Waiting for some future phenomena of worship to reach the unsaved will ensure that many will be lost who could have been saved through a more biblical and practical approach. It is possible that the unbiblical belief that some future phenomena of worship will reach the lost is already responsible for many being lost by creating a passive attitude towards personal evangelism. Equipped believers could have reached these lost people by presenting the simple Gospel of Christ and His cross.

Trends Away from Equipping Believers to Worship

Again, it is difficult to get people that are over-committed to a particular “truth” to listen to how that there might be some problems with that “truth” and the way it is being practiced. Interestingly, while the “supreme” truth of worship has been taught throughout “charismatic” churches, at the same time, fewer people, percentage wise, seem to be worshipping in those same churches. The reason for this is fairly obvious. What’s the reason? It’s the music. The music in modern “charismatic” churches is much more difficult to sing and remember than it has ever been before. The music in charismatic churches is much more complex than the music two and three decades ago. While there are some notable exceptions, in general, the music seems to be much more “performance” oriented than “participation” oriented than before.

While many have been encouraging “excellence” in worship, this has translated itself into “professionalism” across America. This has created an unhealthy trend that easy to see by those who have experiential and historical perspective. Many erroneously believe that worship in the churches is better when it is actually worse in some extremely important respects. For instance, it often requires a group of professional and semi-professional musicians to lead worship in a charismatic congregation today. This was not true several decades ago. A dangerous kind of Old Testament style “Priest-craft” is developing around charismatic worship that is increasingly shutting out the non-musical believer, the average non-professional musician and certainly the children. Some of this “Priest-craft” is increasing supported by teaching from the Old Testament and models of worship drawn from the Old Testament. This teaching has seemingly ignored the New Testament encouragement to five-fold ministry to “equip the saints for the work of ministry” in the arena of worship. Worship is an important ministry for every believer.

Families, small groups, and church plants are unable to duplicate what they hear in the larger charismatic churches today because the music is much too difficult to remember and play. As a result, instead of using a non-professional

to lead worship in a small group or new church plants, many small groups across America are resorting to using compact discs and tapes because of the difficulty of reproducing the music that they are hearing. This is because most small groups, families, and church plants have no “musical priest” to produce the complex worship music for them. It is similar to Roman Catholic Churches that have no priest assigned to them in America. These congregations must import the Eucharist from some priest somewhere because they cannot produce it for themselves because they are not priests. Using CD’s and tapes is similar. The “musical priest” is somewhere else producing the complex worship music that must be imported rather than using the non-professional musicians found in most groups of any size.

Musical Dark Ages in America

We are in danger in America of having a “musical dark-ages” where only musical priests are capable of properly worshipping God and leading others to do so. Of course, this has happened at least once in the history of the early Church. During the time of Paul, he encouraged the believers to sing “hymns, psalms and spiritual songs” and “to make melody in their heart to the Lord”. As the early Church moved towards formal ministry, i.e. bishops, etc., it also moved away from the average believer singing toward “priestly” professionals leading “high music” in the “high Church”. This was music that no one but professionals could reproduce or sing. That period of Church history was known as the Dark Ages. The average Christian was no longer involved in singing or direct worship of Christ during that time. There is real danger of this same phenomena happening in America’s charismatic churches.

While music in charismatic local churches is often beautiful at a degree that was unknown several decades ago, this music often fails to equip people to worship with their children. For instance, a Christian family could sing worship and praise songs for hours together on a trip a few decades ago. It is unlikely that the average young “charismatic” family today can do this as many of us could several decades ago. We have been failing to equip families musically and to worship in recent years. Most of the music is too difficult for children in general and too hard to remember, even for adults, without the aid of CD’s, tapes, and professionals at church. In other words, small group worship, family worship and individual private worship have been weakened in our day by becoming dependent upon professional “musical priests”.

In many places, non-professional musicians are no longer used in ministry in small groups or church plants simply because they cannot compete with the professionalism of CD’s and tapes and the hired professionals of larger churches. Church planting and the development of fledging musicians have been weakened by these trends. Additionally, there are fewer songs being written today that are simple enough to lead a small group, involve children or sing in family times. This will mean over a period of time that there will be

fewer people growing in their musical gifts in the Church in America and fewer people actually worshipping at home without the aid of CD's or tapes. Only professionals, "musical priests", will lead music and fewer of us will be equipped to worship on our own without them. Our children will not experience real worship with their families as they grow up.

How to Change the Trends and Increase Usefulness to God

What's the answer? Several things are necessary if the Church in America is going to accomplish its purpose and please God with its worship. First of all, musicians who write music need to work at simplicity and create music that sticks with believers. "Sticky" music means that a non-musician should be able to learn it after several times of singing it and then be able to sing it in the shower or with their children on a trip. If it is really "sticky", simple and profound, the music should intrude into the conscious mind occasionally without warning. Most complex music is not memorable enough for that to happen.

Secondly, musicians who write music need to focus on equipping non-musicians to worship rather than yielding to any need to impress others, especially other musicians with their musical gifts. They must focus on equipping others to worship rather than just using their musical gifts. They need to write music that is simple, profound, and easily reproduced on a guitar or piano. If the music requires professionals to reproduce it, it is too difficult to equip anyone who is a non-musician.

Thirdly, worship leaders should select songs with the intention of equipping non-musicians to worship at home with their families. This will require deliberate choice of simpler music. A side benefit of this choice will be a greater percentage of people actually worshipping, enjoying, and knowing the music. In concert with simpler music, worship leaders should avoid introducing too many new songs too quickly, particularly those that are complex and not memorable for the same reasons. Worship should not just be a performance of professional musicians on a stage with modest percentage of people in the congregation participating. Worship leaders and music ministers should work at reducing the common denominator between musicians and non-musicians by simplifying the music and increasing the familiarity of the music to the congregation by repetition of songs. While this may not interest musicians as much because it does not challenge them, it serves the congregational members well by equipping them to worship at home and giving them greater opportunity to enter into God's presence in congregational worship. If musicians want to do more than this with their gifts, they should do it among themselves or as "special music" rather than the norm in worship.

Finally, musicians and worship leaders should see themselves as shepherds leading the flock of God to green pastures and still waters. They should recognize that the needs of the youngest lambs are important in God's eyes. The lambs need some milk in worship and cannot stomach much meat. Worship leaders should recognize that their capacity to give in worship is much greater than the lamb's capacity to receive in worship and not overwhelm young believers, children and non-musicians with their ability. The mature sheep hopefully can care for themselves in worship. Worship leaders may be able to move fast and strong in worship but they will leave behind people who are important to God. They should only move as fast as the slowest lamb if they are capable and responsible shepherds to the flock of God. (Written June 19, 2000)

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