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GIVE ME MY PROPS

"Give me my props." What does that phrase mean? It really makes a difference who you are. To a pilot who prefers reciprocating to jet engines it may mean that he would rather fly a propeller plane any day. As an actor, I would probably be asking for whatever items I would have to carry on stage. A really hip teenager (and hip may not be the current correct term) who uses that phrase may be asking you to give him the respect he deserves.

In the U.S. Navy a Chief Petty Officer is afforded a degree of respect not even given to people in equivalent pay grades in the other services. Whenever I go onto the local Air Force base I really appreciate it when the gate guard properly addresses me as "Chief." I like it when somebody gives me my props.

The proper respect that is due God is what we call worship. That word comes from the Old English for the state of having worth, or worship. Moses tells us that God likes to receive his props. "Thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God." (Ex 34:14)

There are many ways we worship God. One of the biggest mistakes new Christians make is to pigeonhole worship into just the time the church assembles together. This is encouraged by calling the assembly a "worship service." That would imply that everything else is either non-worship service or worship non-service. Most of the times that the New Testament refers to Christians assembling together it speaks more about mutual encouragement and teaching than it does about praising and paying homage to God. Even when Paul talks about singing in the assembly (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16), he emphasizes speaking to each other over singing to God.

The words generally translated "worship" in the Bible simply mean to bow down before God. Other than physically or spiritually prostrating oneself before God, nothing else is said about how to give God his props. Nevertheless, we can understand that certain acts and attitudes may be considered worship. As already mentioned, our singing is to God. If it is such that it praises God or glorifies him, then it is worship.

Just the act of living for God is considered worship. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your

reasonable service." (Rom 12:1) Just as worship under the Law of Moses included the bringing of animal sacrifices, so bringing ourselves to God is worship.

Prayer may also be worship. "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." (Heb 13:15) Beyond praise and thanks, prayer can be worship any time we make a request of God. Just the attitude that God is the giver and we can do nothing by ourselves is declaring the worthiness of God.

On the other hand, personal prayers may not be worship. Sometimes prayers may be just a conversation with God. This is not a bad thing. In fact, the more we grow as a Christian perhaps the more our prayers should be like this. "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." (Rom 8:15) The Aramaic word "Abba" he uses here is said to be more intimate than the more formal "father" that he uses here to translate it. When a person is leading a prayer in public, and therefore speaking for others, such intimacy may not be appropriate. Although the assembly is not strictly for worship, that is one of its functions. The prayers, since they are supposed to be for everyone, should probably be more worshipful. Therefore it is more desirable that a man leading the prayers be more worshipful in his approach to God. In his personal prayers he may address God as "Dad" or "Pops," but in the assembly it would be more appropriate to give God his props, and save the Abba for private prayer.

In everything we do we should be giving God the respect he deserves. "Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen." (Php 4:20)

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A SWING OF THE PENDULUM

Because of an article (“A Logic of Salvation”) in last month’s Minutes With Messiah, one site that has a number of links to other “Christian” web sites has decided to remove the link to my site. They have decided that I don’t support their scripturally untenable position that man has absolutely no part in determining his own salvation. (They have removed my link from their site even though they continue to link to sites that hold that man must do something, just that the something is not baptism.) It seems that people who refuse to listen to the scriptures, like those who refuse to believe in them, are willing to persecute those who continue to practice what Jesus and his apostles taught.

I know I am supposed to rejoice that I am persecuted for the sake of my Lord (Matt 5:11-12). Such rejoicing is tinged with the sadness of knowing that some people will do anything to keep others from hearing the truth.

I think I have come away from all of this with one important lesson learned, however. Sometimes congregations of the churches of Christ, and preachers and writers who insist on teaching the whole word of God, overreact to false teaching. When the pendulum swings

The conclusion that we don’t have music in the church could not be further from the truth.

toward those who teach only part of the truth of the Bible, some of us tend to swing the pendulum to the other extreme and teach only that part which was left out. Because we assume that people know the truth in what others say, we neglect to teach that as truth and emphasize only partial truths in our own defense. We forget the old saying in the Churches of Christ (with a capital Church) that just because the Baptists come in through the door doesn’t mean we have to come in through a window.

There are probably a number of things we teach that fall under the heading of truth taught to the extreme. Since many, perhaps most, of my readers attend congregations of various denominations, what I am about to say may seem like “airing our dirty laundry in public.” On the other hand, perhaps it will be seen for what it is, an attempt to show that we

believe in more than just baptism and singing without instruments of music.

The truth must be taught. When others fail to teach the whole truth, then what they leave out must be taught even more. But we need to be careful that we don’t throw out the baby with the bath water. (And I can’t promise that that will be the last cliché I use.)

Instrumental music

Over the past hundred sixty years a portion of the churches in the Restoration Movement in America have strongly taught that the use of “mechanical instruments of music” in the assembly is unscriptural. This conflict resulted in the formation of the Christian Church and is again rearing its head, particularly among churches of Christ that label themselves “progressive.” Two things, at least, have resulted from this teaching. On the positive side, many churches are identified by the world as different because they refuse to follow the traditions of men. On the negative side, many people ask us, “why don’t you believe in music in church?” This latter question shows that we may have overstated our position.

First let me point out that I have yet to attend, or have heard of, a congregation of the churches of Christ that does not believe in music in the church. Most Christians I know, and many congregations of which I have been a part, love the music in the church more than any other aspect of our assemblies. We love to sing. You get two people off in a corner at a dinner or party trying to learn a new song and soon you have a full chorus. (Note to one of my readers: Odeis, you know just what I mean because you have seen it.) Some of the song leaders among us can’t wait to get to heaven so we can spend an eternity singing in and leading the heavenly chorus.

We love to sing, but we have preached singing without musical instruments to the extent that people have come to the conclusion that we don’t have music in the church. Nothing can be further from the truth. We are commanded to include music in our assemblies. “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” (Eph 5:18-19) “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.” (Col 3:16)

What we have taught is that these scriptures are about music, but not about instrumental music. For

hundreds of years the church followed the practice of the Jewish synagogues in rejecting all instruments except the human voice. For hundreds of years more recently, many people in denominational congregations do not follow the command to sing because they are letting others sing for them or they are being entertained by instrumentalists.

I will not stop teaching that an instrument is incapable of “teaching and admonishing” or “speaking.” Perhaps, though, we should be showing others the joys of teaching through song and the freedom of singing without instruments, rather than just teaching that instruments are wrong. If people see our singing they can never say that we are a people who don’t believe in music.

The Holy Spirit

We have spent so much time properly showing from scripture that the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit ended shortly after, and possibly before, the death of the last apostle. Since the apostles (and possibly Cornelius and his household) were the only ones who could pass on these gifts (Acts 8:18), they must necessarily have ended no later than the middle of the second century.

In our haste to defend the scriptures against those who would undermine their authority, many have gone to the extreme of almost denying the Holy Spirit any role in our lives. By denying that the Holy Spirit allows us to perform miracles we shy away from any discussion or manifestation of the Spirit.

The scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit has a significant role in every Christian’s life, even that of those who never had the miraculous gifts. He helps us with our prayers. “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” (Rom 8:26) He has a part in making us right in God’s sight. “Ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Cor 6:11) He is the down payment on our inheritance. “Ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.” (Eph 1:13-14) We must never deny the power of God’s Spirit.

Instead, we should be emphasizing the role of that Spirit. By teaching that the Holy Spirit works in us through the scriptures, because he is the word of God (Eph 6:17), we should be able to show that supposed revelations from God today are both unnecessary and unapproved by God. By showing that the more we study the scriptures the more fully we know, and are known by, the Holy Spirit we show the world that, as the Spirit has told us, “his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness.” (2 Pet 1:3) We need no further revelation or miraculous manifestation of God’s word.

The grace of God

My experience with the web site has shown me that by emphasizing the necessity of baptism we sometimes gloss over our belief in God’s grace. We know that salvation comes only from God. We know that we can never do enough to save ourselves. It is just that when the pendulum swings to the side that emphasizes man’s minor role in his own salvation it necessarily swings us away from our appreciation of God’s role.

We must accept God’s salvation. The scriptures say we do that through immersion in water. Some say we do that through praying a certain prayer or through seeking after the truth. But the fact remains that accepting the gift of God would be impossible if God had never offered the gift in the first place.

Faith, repentance, immersion, obedience are all useless without the grace of God. None of those things, in fact nothing that we can do, can save us by themselves. Yes, Peter says that immersion saves us. (1 Pet 3:21) Yes, Paul says that oral confession of Jesus and faith in his resurrection save us. (Rom 10:9) Yet burial in water

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doesn’t lead to a new life if there is no sacrifice for sin. Confession of Jesus as a man means nothing if he is not the Christ. Faith in the resurrection would be impossible if there were no resurrection to believe in.

Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement. (Rom 5:9-11)

God gave his only son to be our sin offering. He did everything possible to give us salvation. The only thing God does not do is decide for us whether we want to be saved or not. That decision is up to us. The decision is not salvation, even though we can not be saved without deciding to follow God. The death of Christ is our salvation. May we never confuse unwrapping a gift with the gift itself. Without the gift and the giver there would be nothing for us to unwrap.

A CURE FOR INSOMNIA

Some people have a hard time getting to sleep at night. I, on the other hand, am one of those who usually falls asleep before my head hits the pillow. On those rare occasions when I do have trouble sleeping, however, it seems like my brain is going a mile a minute. I move from thought to thought and one worry to another. I've been known to write most of an article in my head trying to get to sleep on a hot night.

When it is hard to go to sleep, people try all sorts of things. Insomnia cures range from warm milk to cold alcohol, from counting sheep to singing lullabies. My father used to turn the radio to fire and brimstone evangelists. (I think Brother Al was more for the white noise than for getting to sleep, though.) I learned from a book by Lewis Carroll, who was a mathematician when he wrote the "Alice" books, to do complex mathematical word problems. The trouble is, these usually keep me awake more than putting me to sleep.

Quite often people have trouble sleeping because of worry. Did I forget to do something at work today? What do I have to do tomorrow? How will I be able to afford to send the kids to college? Why don't we have kids? The list is endless. The problem is that such sleeplessness is unnecessary. If anything, it may indicate a lack of trust in the one who can handle all our problems. When we trust in fleeting riches and the things of this life, we have reason not to sleep. "The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep." (Eccl 5:12)

God can help us sleep when we trust in him, because he never sleeps. "Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep." (Ps 121:4)

When we put ourselves in the hands of the one who does not sleep we will not find it hard to do so ourselves. When we give our worries to God we will not be kept up by them. "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety." (Ps 4:8) Failing to give him our concerns is almost a guarantee that we will have difficulty sleeping. "It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep." (Ps 127:2)

"Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." (Job 28:28) With that thought in mind, Solomon says that wisdom and understanding are sure-fire cures for insomnia.

So shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck. Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble. When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet. Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it cometh. For the LORD shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken. (Prov 3:22-26)

The wise king here says that fearing God and departing evil will not only make you sleep. Your sleep will also be sweet. There is a sleep that is not sweet. Darius the Persian learned that when he threw Daniel to the lions, not trusting in Daniel's God to save him. "Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of music brought before him: and his sleep went from him." (Dan 6:18)

There is a cure for insomnia. As someone has suggested, "When you can't sleep, don't count sheep. Talk to the shepherd."

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