

It Is Written

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Worship Is A “Witness” To The Unbeliever

By Ken Weliever

Since we have been traveling for the past 28 months, we have visited over 40 congregations.

While in most cases I've preached for the churches we visited, sometimes we were just passing through and stopped to worship. Being a visitor, as opposed to being a member of that congregation, seems to have heightened my sense of observation about the worship services, Bible classes, preaching, and our reception by the members.

Today's Bible reading in 1 Corinthians 14, reminds me that we have a responsibility in our worship toward outsiders and non-Christians.

Worship, of course, is primarily about our relationship with the Lord. We come to worship Him. Not to impress others. Or to make ourselves feel good that we're "going to church." He is to be the focus of our spiritual activities (Rev. 4:11; 20:10).

Furthermore, worship is an individual responsibility. I must sing. Pray. Give. Commune. And listen to His Word, making personal application. To be pleasing to God my worship must be accurate and authentic (Jn 4:23-24). When I worship my spirit is elevated as I experience the presence of God and feel the joy of divine association.

The text also reminds us that worship has a collective element. Three words are used that speak to our relationship to one another in the worship service: Edification. Order. Understanding.

“Let all things be done for edification,” Paul admonishes. The word “edify” means to “build up.” Too often we are more concerned about our own edification than building up our brother in Christ. This chapter deals with the abuse of miraculous, spiritual gifts in the assembly. Pride, personal agenda, and unholy egos were driving the worship service.

Their priorities were misplaced. And their heart was in the wrong place. “Pursue love” Paul counseled. Love edifies. And when the church is edified it is strengthened. Motivated to love and good works. And stimulated to greater faithfulness and deeper devotion.

Closely connected with edification is order. “Let all things be done decently and in order” (v. 40). Chaos, confusion and commotion in the assembly distracts us from our primary purpose.

Eight times in this text Paul addresses the importance of understanding. Not only my own understanding but the understanding of other worshipers. The message must be communicated in a way that is meaningful to everyone in the assembly. This requires diligent preparation on the part of worship leaders. And a prepared heart by the worshiper to really hear, really worship, and really make personal application.

Sometimes lost in this chapter, is Paul's concern about the unbeliever who visits the assembly.

“Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers. If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.” (1 Cor 14:22-25).

While miraculous, spiritual gifts have ceased, the principles Paul enunciated are still applicable. Edification, order, and understanding are also an important witness to the unbeliever.

What do visitors see when they worship with our local church family? When they pull into the parking lot? When they enter the building? When they meet the members? When the service begins?

Do they see people who are happy to be together, or seem distant, detached, and aloof?

Do they feel welcomed, or are largely ignored?

Do they hear singing that is enthusiastic and vibrant, or dispassionate and dispirited?

Do they see worshipers who are alert, attentive and focused or people who are drowsy, distracted, and disinterested?

Do they hear a message from God's Word that is carefully crafted to spiritually enlighten, encourage and edify, or a disjointed, rambling monologue filled with personal opinions and subjective conclusions?

Do they feel compelled to worship, or to leave?

Do they want to return, or never come back?

And do they “declare that God is really among you,” or wonder why He isn't?

Brethren, when we assemble Sunday to worship God, let's not forget or neglect outsiders and unbelievers

among us. And, it might we well to examine ourselves and ask, "What do they see?"

"Spiritual Distancing"

By Jarrod M. Jacobs

The term "social distancing" has become a part of our lives in the last month or so. This term caused me to pause and realize that there are more than just physical things from which we need to "distance" ourselves. God has called us to remove ourselves from situations that can cause spiritual ruin. What do I mean? Please study with me.

Proverbs 4:14-15

Solomon made it clear that we need to keep a safe distance from evil people and situations when he said, "Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away."

If this is not the Lord saying, "keep your distance," I don't know what it is saying! Solomon's dad said a similar thing (Ps. 1:1-3). Passages like these make it clear that when we recognize evil men and their ways, we need to get away from them! Do not go near or "dabble" in these things. Do not "walk," "stand," or "sit" with evil people, but go away! "Spiritual distancing," in this case, will help save our souls from Hell!

Proverbs 22:24-25

Another person who needs our distance is the angry, or hot-tempered man. The one who is not in control of his temper and angers easily is not someone that will help us in our spiritual lives. Solomon wrote, "Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: Lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul."

In this verse, we are not only warned about keeping our distance from the hot-tempered person. We're also told why this needs to be done (See also: Prov. 29:22)! Association with these kinds of people will become a snare to our souls as we learn their ways! Young people, have we ever had a talk from our parents who were worried about the friends we had? Did our parents say that when we were around these friends that our attitudes, actions, and personality changed for the worse? Maybe we were influenced and didn't realize it!

Humans are social creatures, and we tend to adapt to whomever we are around. This is why Solomon warns us about who our friends are. Paul issues a similar warning in I Corinthians 15:33. Are we keeping our "spiritual distance" from the hot-tempered ones? Did I just make you angry by bringing this subject up?

II Corinthians 6:14-18

The apostle Paul gave the Corinthians (and us) a severe warning about keeping our "spiritual distance" from sinners. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to inform the brethren, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?....Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

Are we listening to the Lord when it comes to being equally yoked? Just as a reminder, a "yoke" is a farm implement fitted on the necks of two oxen or mules and binding them together so they can pull a plow or wagon or another device. Being yoked puts two animals in close proximity, going the same direction, and doing the same work! For this reason, a farmer using a yoke would choose two animals of equal size, strength, and even the same species to do the work.

To be "unequally" yoked is a hindrance to the task. If one animal is stronger, faster or taller, or even of another species, the work may never be completed! Now, think in spiritual terms. If we are intent on going to Heaven, but "yoked" with someone who does not care about going, then how far might we get in reaching our goal? If we are intent on serving God but are "yoked" to someone who wants to serve self and doesn't understand why we think God is important, we are setting ourselves up for failure or at least for a miserable life!

Paul's warnings are similar to what we have read already in the Proverbs as well as I Corinthians 15:33. Are we keeping a "spiritual distance" from those who want to undermine our spiritual goals? Jesus warned of people like this. Sometimes, these people are in our families! Beware of those who want to sabotage our spiritual lives (Matt. 10:34-39)!

Are we choosing our friends and associates carefully? Young people, who your friends? What about your boyfriend or girlfriend? Is this a person who is trying to help you go to Heaven? Is this person someone helping you avoid temptation or someone who is not concerned?

There are many other reminders on this subject, but these passages are enough to remind us about an essential practice in the lives of Christians. Are there some people who deserve our "distance"? Absolutely! Take some time to "weed out" and put some distance between you and the person(s) who are not helping you reach Heaven!