

Worship: Ditties of Distraction

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Introduction

We honor the Almighty in our spiritual service and worship (Psa. 96:6-9). Unfortunately, God does not always receive the respect that He deserves (Mal. 1:6-8). We must, therefore, exercise great care when we go up to the house of the Lord (Eccl. 5:1).

Psalm 96:6-9 ... 6 Splendor and majesty are before Him, Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary. 7 Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. 8 Ascribe to the Lord the glory of His name; Bring an offering and come into His courts. 9 Worship the Lord in holy attire; Tremble before Him, all the earth. (NASB95)

Malachi 1:6-8 ... 6 “ ‘A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?’ says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name. But you say, ‘How have we despised Your name?’ 7 “You are presenting defiled food upon My altar. But you say, ‘How have we defiled You?’ In that you say, ‘The table of the Lord is to be despised.’ 8 “But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil? Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?” says the Lord of hosts. (NASB95)

Ecclesiastes 5:1 ... 1 Guard your steps as you go to the house of God and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil. (NASB95)

Instead of manifesting a spirit of veneration and reverence toward Our Maker, members are often distracted and inattentive during periods of worship and Bible study. Today we want to focus on various distractions that occur in the services.

“Get Me To The Church On Time”

Habitual tardiness can often be a distraction in the worship services. In the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, the five foolish virgins were not allowed to enter the wedding feast because they were late (Matt. 25:1-13). Their belated arrival at the bridegroom’s house reflected a lack of forethought and misplaced priorities. Why is it that some people are consistently early to work but invariably late to church? We must put first things first. If we set our priorities so as to emphasize spiritual things, this dichotomy will disappear (John 6:27).

Matthew 25:1-13 ... 1 "Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 "Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. 3 "For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, 4 but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. 5 "Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. 6 "But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' 7 "Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. 8 "The foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 9 "But the prudent answered, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' 10 "And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. 11 "Later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' 12 "But he answered, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' 13 "Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour. (NASB95)

John 6:27 ... 27 "Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal." (NASB95)

Even if you do not arrive late, getting to the building in the nick of time can also have its drawbacks. It is hard to rush into the building, sit down, and immediately focus upon Sacred Scripture. Arriving "Just in Time" makes it hard on brethren. Teachers often lose the first few minutes of class; students are distracted by the commotion caused by those who rush in with the sounding of the bell. "Just in Time" makes it hard on deacons who are responsible for scheduling assignments. "Just in time" may be an accepted inventory strategy for businesses, but Christians should have a different set of priorities.

"Yackety, Yack! Don't Talk Back!"

Unnecessary talking can often be a distraction in the worship services. The assembly of the saints is not a time for casual conversation, whispering, giggling, passing notes, sending text messages, twittering, etc. Reverential silence demonstrates our respect for the Lord; hushed attentiveness shows our reverence for His will (Deut. 27:9-10; Hab. 2:20).

*Deuteronomy 27:9-10 ... 9 Then Moses and the Levitical priests spoke to all Israel, saying, "**Be silent and listen, O Israel!** This day you have become a people for the Lord your God. 10 "You shall therefore obey the Lord your God, and do His commandments and His statutes which I command you today." (NASB95)*

Habakkuk 2:20 ... 20 "But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him." (NASB95)

Albert Einstein, the famous German-born physicist, was a late talker as a child. As time passed, and Albert still refused to talk, his parents became quite worried. At last, at the supper table one night, he broke his silence to say, "The soup is too hot." Greatly relieved, his parents asked why he had never said a word before. Young Albert replied, "Because up to now everything was in order." Perhaps if we were less vocal at inopportune times, we might be thought more like

Einstein and less like the village idiot. It is better to hold one's peace and be thought a fool, than to inappropriately open one's mouth and unmistakably prove it (Prov. 13:16; 15:2).

Proverbs 13:16 ... 16 Every prudent man acts with knowledge, But a fool displays folly. (NASB95)

Proverbs 15:2 ... 2 The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable, But the mouth of fools spouts folly. (NASB95)

“Are You Sleeping, Brother John?”

Sleeping saints can be a distraction in the worship services. Such folk set a bad example to others, especially to the young and visitors. Admittedly, there are times when fatigue wears us down. Medications can also cause drowsiness. However, I am primarily concerned with sleepiness that is caused by either poor judgment or a lack of interest. Why stay up late on Saturday night if you know it will diminish your attentiveness on Sunday morning? What is worth watching on late-night television anyway? Get to bed at a decent hour. Cultivate an interest in spiritual things (1 Chron. 28:9). I am amazed how some people will “perk up” if you pause in a sermon to relate a story about hunting or fishing, but immediately “drift off” when you turn back to the Bible. Why is this so? They are mindful of the things of this world, but not of the things of God. Those who are committed to serving God will not fall asleep during the services with any regularity. The Scriptures admonish us to “Awake and arise!” (Eph. 5:14-16).

1 Chronicles 28:9 ... 9 “As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever. (NASB95)

Ephesians 5:14-16 ... 14 For this reason it says, “Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you.” 15 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, 16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil. (NASB95)

“Ain’t Misbehaving/Cry Me A River”

Misbehaving children/teens/adults can often be a distraction in the worship services. Children usually mimic the behavior of others. If their parents are unconcerned about worship, they will be also. Parents should set the right example and provide positive leadership: clearly distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable conduct, and then consistently enforce your will (Prov. 22:15; 29:15). Brother Connie Adams, discussing what parents should do when their children misbehave during the services, offered these words of wisdom: “Take them out, wear them out, and then bring them back in.” Don’t unwittingly reward bad behavior with a free trip to the fun room. The nursery is a place for mothers to tend to the needs of their infants. It is a place for parents to administer discipline. It is not a place for fun and games. Parents should deal with misbehavior so that children fear whenever they are taken out of the auditorium. I am reminded of the little boy who had been an unholy terror during worship services. As his dad took him out

of the auditorium, the child shouted “Pray for me!” He knew what was coming. On another occasion, a mother had to take her little girl to the nursery. As they walked to the back, the child said, “Can’t we sit back down? I’m through crying...” “Oh no you’re not!” replied her mother. She understood the need for discipline.

Proverbs 22:15 ... 15 Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of discipline will remove it far from him. (NASB95)

Proverbs 29:15 ... 15 The rod and reproof give wisdom, But a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother. (NASB95)

“Lollipop, Lollipop, Bring Me A Lollipop”

Food and drink can often be a distraction in the worship services. It is somewhat eye-opening to clean the building after a typical assembly. You may find gum and candy wrappers in the seat. Breakfast cereal may be scattered all over the floor. In some places we’ve lived, it is only a slight exaggeration to say that I’m surprised we haven’t found boxes of Chinese take-out stuffed in the song-book rack. Let us distinguish between infants and older children. Infants demand nourishment on a regular schedule. There is nothing wrong in feeding an infant when they are hungry. However, older children should learn to behave without parents having to bribe them with cheerios, cookies, crackers, and candy. The worship assembly is not an occasion for common meals, either on a large or small scale (Rom. 14:16-17; 1 Cor. 11:20-22, 33-34).

Romans 14:16-17 ... 16 Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; 17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 11:20-22 ... 20 Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper, 21 for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you. (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 11:33-34 ... 33 So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. 34 If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you will not come together for judgment. The remaining matters I will arrange when I come. (NASB95)

Conclusion

Worship is a serious matter. If you think this sermon is strict, just be thankful you were not a Puritan living in the 17th century. Sermons would often last for hours on end. A church official held a “tickling rod” to awaken anyone who looked like he might be falling asleep. Their buildings were so cold, people often brought warming boxes with hot coals in them to keep their feet from freezing. Sometimes they brought their dogs to church for the same reason. However, you had to keep Ol’ Rover quiet. A dog-whipper took out dogs who barked. If you were a troublemaker, or wiggled in your seat, or made noise during the assembly, you might be locked

up in the town stocks. Offending women were sometimes punished by being tied to a ducking stool, and repeatedly lowered into a stream or village pond. Naughty children were whipped with a birch stick or cane.ⁱⁱ

Other brethren have addressed this problem in different ways: Connie Adams once wrote an article in which he described the manicurist, the sleeper, the isle-roamer, the gum-chewer, the homework-getter, and the invitation-upsetter. Some years ago, Weldon Warnock wrote an article for the *Gospel Guardian* entitled, "What Kind Of Worshipper Are You?" He then described the spasmodic worshipper who is hit or miss in his attendance; the irreverent worshipper who sleeps, talks, and generally shows a lack of respect during the services; the bored worshipper who constantly watches the clock and refuses to participate; the observant worshipper who constantly watches other people and focuses on trifles and trivialities; the tardy worshipper who is always late and unprepared; the worldly worshipper who practices evil through the week and thinks he can atone for it simply by showing up on Sunday morning; finally, there is the devoted worshipper who appeals to God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). Let us learn how to behave in the house of God (1 Tim. 3:14-16). Thus we will not be guilty of singing the ditties of distraction.

John 4:23-24 ... 23 "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. 24 "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (NASB95)

1 Timothy 3:14-16 ... 14 I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; 15 but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. 16 By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory. (NASB95)

ⁱ Clifton Fadiman, ed., *The Little Brown Book of Anecdotes*, (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1985), p. 186.

ⁱⁱ Joy Hakim, *A History of US: Making Thirteen Colonies*, (New York: Oxford Press, 1993), p. 64-65.