

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).

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).

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).

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.”²¹ 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).

“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).

“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.

“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).

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.

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.