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CHRISTIAN ARRAY

RESTORING THE RESTORATION
IN OUR GENERATION

NUMBER 9

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 1990

ACAPELLA?

In the December, 1989 thru May, 1990 issues of this newsletter we advertised the Acapella Singing Group in an area wide youth devotional in August at the Music Hall. Acapella is a group of young men who accompany their singing with imitations of instrumental music. They do it very well.

In June we received a letter questioning the scripturalness of the practices of this group. As we want to maintain a high degree of confidence that we are remaining completely scriptural, we deleted this announcement thereafter and began a review of this matter. The following is the conclusions of the study.

How to ascertain the reasonableness of the objection is an interesting matter. He felt that it seemed intuitively wrong for Christians to attend performances of other Christians imitating instrumental music in a worship service. To many others, it seemed intuitively right to attend a social event which included a popular group using their specialized talents to praise the Lord.

We now have an intuitively right and an intuitively wrong for the same subject, to which we can conclude that intuition cannot be trusted. If intuition cannot be trusted, how do you determine the reasonableness or truth in a subject? The obvious answer is from the Bible, although both sides of this question included Bible scholars.

There are a number of ways to approach this subject, however, one required sequence to demonstrate that the practices of this group are wrong would be:

1. Instrumental music in a church service is wrong in of itself and therefore represents evil.
2. Imitating instrumental music in worship service gives the appearance of evil and is therefore an evil.
3. Area wide youth rallies are a worship service and so imitation of instrumental music in an area wide youth rally is evil.

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN A WORSHIP SERVICE:

Although it is not the purpose of this article, we will assume that it is wrong (i.e. evil) to use instrumental music in the worship services. There is no direct command to not use instrumental music, however, the type of music is specified, i.e. singing (Eph. 5:19).

This is further reinforced by the fact that history teaches that instrumental music was not used in the first century church. The subject was bitterly fought until approximately 667 A.D. when the innovation of instrumental music was accepted into the establishment church. Clearly, if you desire to follow the New Testament pattern, you will attend a church without instrumental music.

IMITATING INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN WORSHIP SERVICE

I Thes. 5:22 teaches that we should abstain from all appearance of evil. If we can conclude that instrumental music is an unscriptural addition to the New Testament teachings, it should be reasonable to conclude that it represents an evil in the worship service. This would not be your personal opinion of evil, it would be the Bible defining what is wrong by defining something else as proper.

If we reach the point of considering instrumental music as evil within a worship service, what would taking on the appearance of instrumental music be? It would not be attempting to look like a piano. It might be a number of things, however, it should be reasonable to say that attempting to sound like an evil in worship service would be an evil in worship service. The talent to sound like a banjo in your worship services should be completely equal to playing a tape recording of a banjo, or for that matter for playing the banjo. We should tolerate none of these.

Certainly we should be able to say that if it is evil to have an instrument of music in worship services, it would be evil to act like an instrument of music in worship services.

ARE "AREA WIDES" WORSHIP SERVICES?

In the 20th century, we tend to think that a worship service only occurs in the main auditorium of a church building, with multiple elders watching, and with a set sequence of events. Sunday morning is the real worship service as it includes the five "acts of worship": singing, preaching, praying, communion, and contribution. Sunday night and Wednesday night services are somewhat abbreviated, but generally recognized to be worship services. A devotional in someone's home seems more like a social event than a worship service. The idea of an individual member being in charge of a worship service seems foreign to a lot of members today. What would the elders think?

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What are the actual requirements of a worship service?

1. The term "worship service" is not a scriptural term. It is found nowhere in the Bible. The term is coined to reflect the gathering of Christians together to praise God. We must be careful or the artificial term "worship service" may provide artificial distinctions in the activities of the church which did not exist in the first century.
2. Jesus said "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am in their midst." (Matthew 18:20) Does that not make it a worship service? There you have it: a worship service requires at least 2 people and it must be done in Jesus' name.

There are no examples in the New Testament where the first century Christians actually did the "5 acts of worship" at any one time. We have reasonably grouped them together for convenience.

3. Any service which the elder's are in charge of is a worship service. Would instrumental music be O.K. in Bible class? Do you think that the Baptists would think that a Billy Graham crusade in the Music Hall was not a worship service?

It should be reasonably noted that the church buildings could be used for activities which are not worship services, and which might well use instrumental music.

It would be hard to imagine that an event would take place which the elder's would be asserting "shepherding charge" over, which should reasonably involve instrumental music.

Given these considerations, we have drawn the following conclusions:

CONCLUSION 1: Instrumental music is not a sin of itself. There are certainly a multitude of ways and places in which instrumental music can be played having no religious connotations attached to it. It is wrong to use instrumental music in worship services.

CONCLUSION 2: A key is what will the world think we are doing? Are we taking on the appearance of evil. If the world sees a church of Christ related music program at the Music Hall imitating instrumental music, what will they think? If you don't know the answer, they will probably say "What a bunch of hypocrites!"

CONCLUSION 3: If it is O.K. to imitate instrumental music, then it would be O.K. to use the instrumental music. Before you send your kids to another Acapella presentation, ask yourself if it would be O.K. if they used a band in their place. Would you allow the instrumental music imitation in your auditorium at your morning service?

CONCLUSION 4: Surely area wide youth devotionals are worship services to God. There is no scriptural distinctions between a worship service at the Music Hall and one at a "church building".

CONCLUSION 5: If a leadership sends their youth to attend area wide devotionals which feature imitation of instrumental music, what are you teaching them. Are you not teaching them that the appearance of instrumental music is acceptable to you? Are you not then teaching that instrumental music is not wrong as the appearance of instrumental music is not wrong?

SUMMARY CONCLUSION

The conclusion drawn is that area wide youth devotionals are worship services, instrumental music is wrong (evil) in worship services, imitation of instrumental music is taking on the appearance of wrong (evil) in worship services, and therefore it is not reasonable to support the activities of instrumental music imitating groups in worship services, including area wide youth devotionals.

As we commented above, before this study we advertised the activities of the instrumental music imitation group in past issues of this newsletter. At this time we have concluded that we were wrong in doing so. We apologize for any difficulty which we might have caused to anyone.

HOW MANY ELDERS?

There is precious little information actually given on the organizational operations of the local congregations in the Bible. Within the scriptural teachings, there are a number of organizational options available. Some of what we are accustomed to in the church is traditional, not a scriptural requirement. The board of directors style of eldership operation in larger congregations is such a tradition. There are surely several alternate scriptural styles available. This article will compare two: the board of director style and a plural style.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS STYLE: A number (6-12) of elders are maintained which can conveniently be accommodated by the board of directors format of the congregational business system. (Reappointment after attrition)

PLURAL STYLE: All qualified men that the congregation chooses to appoint (Frequent appointments, i.e. annual, no limit on number)

Certainly the board of directors style is most commonly used among larger churches. Its main benefit is obvious, it is a bureaucratically controllable number of men. You don't get so many men together that they can't get along well enough to get anything done.

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EFFECTS OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS STYLE

1. Families / elder increases to an unmanageable number, so personal shepherding is abandoned.
2. Crises / elder increases to the point that only reaction time to crises is available.
3. Elders do not have time to lead, only to police.
4. The eldership will tend to reproduce its personality as only "friends" will tend to wait out the appointment process.

EFFECTS OF THE PLURAL STYLE

1. More encouragers will be available per family to oversee the flock.
2. A relatively constant number of families per shepherd will exist, irrespective of how large the congregation grows.
3. The eldership will tend to more accurately reflect the cross section of the congregation.
4. Men in the maturing age of life are appropriately pulled into the leadership of the congregation. They don't have to wait for someone to die.
5. Men will tend to be pulled into the leadership while they are younger and more energetic. The average age of the eldership will be lower.
6. The elder's time will not be limited to only response time to crises (following the congregation), time will be available for advance planning (leading).

One of the criticisms of the plural style is the potential of a large number of elders. An overabundance of elders is not very likely, however, it should be a tremendous blessing to a congregation. If you want to put them all on a board of directors to handle the deacon's decisions, it is a problem. If you want them to shepherd the flock, it is great.

If a congregation is so large that a large number of elders are available, hire a manager who knows Robert's Rules of Order.

The choice remains:

1. A board of directors style of operation in which the number of elders is kept down to a "practical" number to supervise the details of the congregation. The observational conclusion to this is that a high percentage of the elder's available time will be consumed in details, leaving a low percentage available for real shepherding.
2. A plural style with a number of elders proportionate to the number of members of the congregation. Specific arrangements for the physical details will be made to be handled by others (i.e. deacons, hired managers, members). A high percentage of the elder's available time is used to do actual shepherding and a low percentage of available time is used for supervising physical details of the congregational.

Both styles are scriptural and are chosen at the discretion of the local elderships. Look around you. You know the style which has been used to administer non-growth situations for years. Ask yourself... does the term "elder" mean shepherd or director?

THE FIVE FINGERED PLAN TO TURN A CHURCH AROUND

The following comments assume that the congregation has been in decline for several years and desires to become a vibrant growing congregation again.

1. THE THUMB OR OLD UGLY

Make a realistic evaluation of the status of the congregation. If the congregation has not grown in the past several years and the leadership thinks that a little adjustment or one new program will turn it around, they are not ready to grow. In many cases, an objective outside observer may be required to give a realistic analysis of the situation.

2. THE INDEX FINGER, POINTING THE WAY

After a realistic determination of the current status of the congregation, a clear picture of where the congregation should be going needs to be drawn. The ideals should be set out without consideration of the perceived practicalities of the situation.

3. TALLEST FINGER, THE BIG JOB

Know where you are and where you need to go, and then the tallest or biggest job comes. Determining the price you must pay to get to your goal. What makes this especially difficult is that some of the prices are difficult to determine. some of the prices can be:

- a. Abandonment of the business systems which form a part of the congregation's bureaucracy which inhibits growth and divides the members. Reevaluate everything but the Bible.
- b. Open communications must be maintained between the individual members and the leadership. Not as perceived by the leadership, but the members.
- c. Elders should be prepared to commit all their resources to being Elders. if they want to act as deacons, let them step down and become deacons.
- d. All questionably qualified leaders should resign so that the congregation will have complete respect for the leadership. Desire is a qualification)

4. THE RING FINGER, MAKING THE COMMITMENT

Knowing the price which must be paid for the congregation to grow, a decision must be made to pay the price. All of the leadership and most of the members need to make the commitment.

5. THE LITTLEST FINGER, THE SMALLEST JOB

It will be contrary to conventional wisdom, but doing the work will be the smallest part of the task. The requirements of sections 1-4 of this plan are potentially traumatic to various individuals within a congregation.

The good news is that when a good plan begins, the results will be gratifying and provide enthusiasm to work. It will be a pleasure to participate, not a burden to attend.

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DENOMINATIONS CLAIM TO BE UNSCRIPTURAL

CONCLUSION: The denominational claim to using tradition, reason, experience, and scriptures to determine doctrines is a claim to not follow only the scriptures. It is inherent in that claim that you will develop and teach unscriptural doctrines.

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Many denominations claim to derive their teachings from a "four pronged approach". The four prongs are tradition, reason, experience, and scripture. (1)

We shall assume for this discussion that the "scripture" portion of the "four pronged approach" is what can be derived from the scriptures, and therefore is scriptural. Any doctrine which can be supported by the scriptures would be supported by the scriptures. Why would anyone say I "reason" that this is true, when he can quote the authority of the Bible.

Any doctrine which cannot be supported by the scriptures is not of the scriptures, or is unscriptural. With this understanding, the definition of the other prongs are relatively easy to define:

TRADITION: Doctrines that denominational (or Catholic) forefathers decided to follow which were unscriptural (not supported in the scriptures).

EXPERIENCE: Doctrines that denominational (or Catholic) members have decided to follow in our present lifetimes which are unscriptural (not supported in the scriptures).

REASON: Doctrines that we are presently deciding to follow which are unscriptural (not supported in the scriptures).

This may seem like a simplification, but it is simply true. I repeat the question: Why would any doctrine be defended by tradition, reason, or experience when Biblical authority can be used.

It is inherent that the claim to using tradition, reason, experience, and scriptures to determine your doctrines is a claim to not follow only the scriptures. If you follow a doctrine not in the scriptures, you are following an unscriptural doctrine.

We invite you to attend your local church of Christ where the scriptures are the only guide in determining doctrine.

(1) "Methodist Meeting Keeps The Status Quo", The Houston Chronicle, May 7, 1988, Section 6, Page 2

EVENTS CALENDAR:

AREA WIDE CONGREGATIONAL EVENTS

CREATON OR EVOLUTION - WHICH?

W/ Dr. Bert Thompson of Apologetics Press
Memorial, 900 Echo Lane, 464-0271

9-21 10:00-11:00 a.m. KPRC AM Radio 950

9-21 @ 7:30 p.m. "Creationist, Science, Dinosaurs and the Bible

9-22 @ 7:30 p.m. "Questions You've Asked about Creation/Evolution:

9-23 @ 9:00 a.m. "Teaching Our Children Christian Evidences"

9-23 @ 10:00 a.m. "The Existence of God"

9-23 @ 5:00 p.m. "The Ethics of Genetic Engineering"

WORSHIP REVIVAL WEEKEND: 11-3 & 4-90

W/ Ken Hilterbrand & Richard Jones
Memorial, 900 Echo Lane, 464-0271

AREA WIDE YOUTH EVENTS:

FIRST ANNUAL CHRISTIAN COLLEGE DAY

Presentations by several colleges

11-18-90 @ 2:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Memorial, 900 Echo Lane, 464-0271

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