

MARANATHA MESSENGER

Weekly Newsletter of

MARANATHA BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

"Present e man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Colossians 1:28).

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Address: 63 Cranwell Road, Singapore 509851 Tel: (65) 6545 8627 Fax: (65) 6546 7422

E-mail: maranatha.bpc@pacific.net.sg Website: www.maranatha-bpc.com *

Sunday School: 9.45 am Worship Service: 10.45 am Wednesday Prayer Meeting: 8.00 pm

Pastor: Rev (Dr) Jack Sin (HP: 9116 0948)

Examination of Contemporary Worship in the Light of the Regulative Principle

Introduction

In recent times, a dark cloud of liturgical changes has swept across the globe. It has not only invaded large liberal churches but has also affected small conservative churches (ie Hillsongs group of music makers from Sydney coming to Singapore). It's fashionable and contemporary songs have been well-sought after, well-liked, and well-received by the churches and especially so by the younger congregation. So what is this new phenomenon that is impinging on the churches today? And how are we to react to it? The crux of the matter is what does the Bible say about it? The abuse and misuse of public worship has not been a new occurrence. During the Middle Ages, worship too had been corrupted in many liturgical and ceremonial lifeless forms. From one founded on God's principles, became one that had its anchor on man's whims and fad and fallacies. Without the sure study of the word of God, and without the zealous guarding of the faith, abuses do creep into the church once. Harmful influences and wrong doctrines may enter into the church through whatever possible means, be it through sheer defiance or subtle approaches, influencing young and old.

We shall consider the current widespread Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) movement in light of scriptures and also through the Regulative Principle of Worship (RPW). And thus, the essay will be divided into two parts; the first section: will cover the history and foundation of the RPW, and highlights the rules that it delineates; second section: the RPW and the scriptures will be used to assess the prevalent music scene that has made its presence felt in many churches which we shall consider here.

The RPW : The Foundation for Reformation

During the Middle Ages, the worship of God had been interspersed with man's definition and fanciful ideas of what worship is. Ceremonialism, sacerdotalism, sacramentalism were the order of the day. The display of icons, veneration of Mary and the Saints, incense burning, dramas, festivals, and carnivals were all part of worship that to God that was defined by man. New innovations and expressions were added as an act of honouring God. However, it was clear that this new style of worship had departed from the teachings and practices of the Old and the New Testament.

During the Reformation, God raised up a generation of mighty and able men like Calvin, Luther, Zwingli, Knox; the Puritans who spoke defiantly against such unbiblical practices, rituals, ceremonies and doctrines (ie transubstantiation) that were not in line with the reading of the Bible. They sought to restore the simple teachings and worship that was practised during the New Testament times. Under God's providential and sovereign hand, he delivered them from the bondage of Rome and subsequently, the Westminster divines assembled together in 1643 by 121 godly men, over 1163 sessions in Westminster Abbey in England to properly formulate and doctrines in accordance with the Word of God and to establish the principles and guidelines for public worship, Church government and Church discipline.

The RPW may be used to assess and evaluate the existing CCM phenomenon that is sweeping across the globe and affecting churches big and small, conservative or liberal, both young and old. No one is spared from its seductive snares and enchanting coils often with its highly contagious Contemporary Christian Music (with dancing). It is only by expounding and obeying God's word that we can contain it and prevent it from spreading into our churches as we need to stand firm and evaluate all forms of doctrines and new practices that may creep into the

church through blatant or latent means today.

[1] Should the music suit the whims and fancies of man?

CCM focuses on the music and the musicians: The exterior packaging, popularity factor and trendy image that they present indirectly and directly draws followers to themselves. The core and the essence of their product is not about the pure gospel or Christ, but themselves and what the audience wants.

The Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) has given us clearly, what the second commandment dictates, and accordingly, the sins that are forbidden in the second commandment. The second commandment states that "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments."

The duties required in the second commandment include the receiving, observing, keeping pure and entire all the religious worship instituted in His Word, particularly prayer and thanksgiving in the name of Christ; the reading, preaching and hearing of the Word and disapproving, detesting, opposing all false worship, according to each one's place and calling, removing it and all monuments of idolatry. In any case, today's idols may not "be on the shelves but in ourselves" (ie self-styled worship with showmanship). Hence, following this elaboration, the sins that are condemned in the second commandment includes the devising, counselling, using, and anywise, approving any religious worship not instituted by God himself. Therefore, the making of any representation of God (eg The Passion of the Christ) and feigned deities, the corrupting of the worship of God adding to it, or taking from it, whether invented or taken up from ourselves under the title of custom, devotion, or good will should be rejected.

The second commandment refutes all man-centred worship or false deities (or represented God in a physical forms) that may enter into the church to rob God of His glory. CCM has distinctly transgressed God's word and its commands. The subtle underlying influences and philosophies of CCM may not be easily spotted, but by God's grace and wisdom and a careful study of His Word, believers must be wary and vigilant against all forms of false worship and if necessary, one needs to expose it and oppose it.

Analysis:-

Any images or representation that has the effect of robbing God of His glory must be repudiated. CCM entices young worshippers to itself and do not follow or adhere to biblical principles and guidelines. It is man-centred showmanship rather than God-centred.

[2] Can the church have its music style after the world?

The sensual dressing, addictive drum beat, and special sound effects atmosphere, are attempts to imitate the world, and re-create an emotional experience that is often psychologically charged up and sentimental in nature.

The First Commandment writes, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me". The Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) teaches us that we are to know and acknowledge God to be the one true God, and our God; and to worship and glorify Him accordingly, by thinking, meditating, remembering, highly esteeming, honouring, adoring, choosing, loving, desiring, fearing of Him, believing him, trusting, hoping, delighting, rejoicing in Him; giving all praise and thanks, and yielding all obedience and submission to Him with the whole man; being careful in all things to please Him and to be sorrowful in anything that He is offended; and walking humbly with Him. Furthermore, we are not to have or worship more gods than one, or any with or instead of the true God, the omission or neglect of any thing due to Him. Ignorance, forgetfulness, misapprehensions, false opinions, unworthy and wicked thoughts of Him, self-love, self-seeking and all other inordinate and immoderate setting of our mind, will or affections upon other things, and taking them off from Him in whole or in part.

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1643-47) especially in the Directory of Public Worship is self-explanatory and has stated in precise terms how we to or not to worship God. The misdemeanour to misappropriate God's glory and honour through whatsoever means or method is contemptible and unacceptable. God's glory and honour must be ascribed to Him

in fullness and whole, not in part or reduced (Jer 9:23-24).

[3] Can Worship for God be used as a tool for evangelism?

The CCM songs are apparently designed to reach out to both Christians and non-Christians alike with a superficial flavour, appealing to the senses and the gospel message is ironically watered down and the doctrine of repentance diluted so that it would cater to these “onlookers” who do not wish to commit to Christianity sincerely to follow Christ (ie Alpha Course).

It is unacceptable to deliberately draw the believer’s mind away from simply adoring and worshipping our God. Instead of coming with a penitent heart and quiet spirit to praise Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24), the CCM adopts strange practices during worship in the name of “freedom in the Spirit”. There has been a dramatic shift of priority: from worshipping our one and only God to the stance of reaching out to friends and or pure entertainment.

The Regulative Principle of Worship explains in clear terms our reason for coming to the worship service. Lev 10:3 says explicitly that “By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified”. The emphasis is on the God-ward aspect not the outward element of man-centred worship. CCM encourages hearer the tendency to the reverse and promotes the wrong cause.

Analysis:-

The RPW guards the nature of the worship and lists the appropriate steps that a sinner has to take in coming before Him. The true nature of the worship service is to give glory to God and to. It is not for catered for non-believers’ needs and wants. Worst still, worship is not designed as an intermediary tool to entertain believers or non-believers but to glorify and enact the name of God. This worldly compromise in worship must be exposed and refuted. We also need to use theologically-correct words in our hymns. Consider the following below:-

Some CCM lyrics

“ The **Darling** of heaven crucified”

“ **Jesus, You are my World**”

“ I am **desperate** for you”

The inappropriate choice of words (bold) does not accurately represent reverence to Christ and His teachings.

Furthermore, the words chosen reveals disrespect and lack of biblical, reverential knowledge of God and His word. This faulty understanding is then propelled to believers when they sing songs of praises to Him.

The RPW requires the public reading of the Holy Scriptures and the proper preaching of the Word. This should be administered faithfully according to the Word of God with a purpose of edifying the believers. Most importantly, no human concoctions or terms are to be used. Everything should be done according to the dictates of the Bible (1 Cor 14:33,40 on decency and order; 1 Chr 16:29) on holiness in worship. False practices are to discerned and discarded. The teaching of sound and biblical teaching must be the priority of the church. The foundation of doctrines must be rooted on the Word of God and his truth. The Westminster Confession of Faith states that “the reading of scriptures is to be done with godly fear, the sound preaching and conscionable hearing of the Word, in obedience unto God, with understanding, faith, reverence, singing of psalms with grace in the heart.” The importance of pure doctrines can never be understated, and it is the duty of Christians to evaluate and be wary of all corrupt teachings and phrases that is not advocated by the Bible. Let us not be fooled or deceived by these false “patterns of words” to undermine true worship today.

God-Honouring Worship

We have listed evidences which prove that the CCM movement has serious flaws and defects. Their focus, emphasis, approach and doctrines are distorted and have deviated from that which is taught to us in the scriptures.

We are thankful to God for the Regulative Principle of Worship by the assembly in the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the scriptures which have clearly delineated for us the proper and decorous way to enter into God’s presence and to worship Him. The RPW is a God-honouring, God-centred, and God-directed principle that has been passed down since the

Reformation. It is an legitimate precept that is taught in and supported by the Bible. It is timeless and eternal, faithful and steadfast. We thank God for devoted men and women who have carefully searched the Word of God and put together these rules for themselves and for later generations. History has repeated itself, and man has once again started to innovate and introduce new practices and styles of worship into the church today in the 21st century. Let us as Christians hold fast to the true form of acceptable and God-honouring worship and not compromised. Be forewarned and cautioned against any subtle deception which may enter the church in any form through the Hillsongs group, Alpha Course, contemporary worldly music; loud and jarring instruments or other unbiblical practices.

Sinners have no right to approach God in whatever way that they imagine or propose. The only acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself. God is Spirit and those that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in Truth (John 4:21-24). Let the Word of God be our guide and not selfish imaginations and schemes of man.

In conclusion, consider the following (adapted from FEBC class notes on Biblical Worship) by Dr Jack Sin.

The Principles of Biblical Worship

1. Who God is and what he has done for us; we worship the Almighty God because of His nature and character, and as an expression of gratitude for His work of Redemption.
2. We worship in reverence and fear because God is worthy of it, for He is the awesome and omniscient God (Exod 34:6)
3. We worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). God has ordained in His word in which He wants to be worshipped, and it is not left to the whims and fancies of man's depraved imaginations eg Idols and icons
4. We worship God in the singing of psalms and hymns, prayer, reading of Scriptures, the giving and tithing (responsible stewardship), in the attentive listening and observance of the Word and in the keeping of the sacraments.
5. Notice what Jesus said of worship in John 4:24, God is a Spirit: and they that Worship him must worship him in Spirit and in truth.
 - a. Biblical worship is determined by God himself and not by man's vain imaginations (Exod 20:1-5).
 - b. Biblical worship is essentially spiritual in nature (not physical or emotional) and is based on truth (sound doctrines) and not experiences or feelings (John 4: 21-25).
 - c. Biblical worship is characterised by order and decency and not by chaos and confusion (1 Cor 14:33,40).
 - d. Biblical worship is governed by reverence, fear, holiness because we worship and serve a thrice-holy God.

Characteristics of liberal, charismatic, neo-evangelical churches

1. Worship entertainment and show time, self-styled homespun action, according to men's imaginations, rather than the Christ directed reverential worship.
2. Appeals to the emotions and emphasis on the external, eg speaking in tongues, laughter, dancing.
3. Less and less of the singing of Psalms and meaningful theological sound hymns, but new choruses of a superficial nature.
4. Less of expository, doctrinal preaching, more of activity-oriented and interactive worship service.
5. Less spiritual in nature, more physical in action.
6. It is a humanistic form of showmanship and performance rather than the worship of the living and true God. There is a danger of a consumer-oriented church.

Conclusion

Let us be vigilant of false worship practices today and be compliant to God's holy Word and keep to the straight and narrow way of the biblical principles of reformed worship given to us in the Westminster Confession of Faith today rather than to invent new man-made practices that are incompatible with God's divine instructions concerning worship.

Lydia Beh

Q & A

Question: "Why is church membership important?" Can I be a perpetual visitor of a church?

Answer: The universal Church, ie the Body of Christ (Rom 12:5) composed all the elect or true believers in Christ past, present and future. Non-believers are not part of the Body of Christ; therefore, it would seem that God keeps a "membership list" of who is in the Church (Mal 3:16). We see a list in Rev 20:12, the Lamb's book of life. If the universal Church has a "membership roll" in heaven for the elect, it would be appropriate for local churches to maintain a list of members on earth too.

In the time of the early church, "the Lord added to them daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). This verse indicates that salvation is a pre-requisite for being "added" to the church. Churches today which require salvation before membership (and hence baptism later as a sign of the covenant after a catechism class of understanding and studying sound, reformed doctrines) are simply following the biblical model. See also 2 Cor 6:14-18 for reference.

Membership in the local church is strongly implied in our Lord and Paul's instructions to the Corinthians to "put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (1 Cor 5:13). The preceding verse speaks of those "without" and "within" the local church (Matt 18:15-20). Such language is meaningless without a clearly defined group of members in a local community of believers who share the same doctrinal beliefs.

Why is church membership important? Church membership is a way of officially identifying yourself with a local body of believers. Church membership is a statement that you are in agreement with the doctrines and practices of that local church and are a member or representative of it. Church membership is also a good way of determining who is committed and allowed to vote on important church decisions and/or who is involved in official church positions / functions and they have a part to play in the life and direction of the church. Church membership is not only sound but necessary for all Christians. It is simply a way of saying, "I am a Christian and I believe in God and to demonstrate that '...' I am a member of this church which I identify which."

It is proper to prayerfully consider membership in a Bible believing church after attending it for a year or two when you are ministered to by the preaching of the Word, worship and fellowship of that church and in due time to serve therein as well. To be a perpetual visitor in a church will be likened to someone who court or date a girl friend or boy friend for life in a non-committal relationship without the desire of marrying the person even after many years of courtship and serious relationship and that will be quite strange. Something to pray about. Hope this helps.

Jack Sin

Q & A

Question: "Why did God allow evil and did God create evil?"

Answer: This is a profound question, especially in the light of the Indonesian tsunami, 17 July 2006 that killed more than 550 people affected many and other recent disastrous events. Look at the example of Job in Job chapters 1-2. Satan wanted to destroy Job, and God allowed Satan to test and try him, but kill Job. God allowed this to happen to prove to Satan that Job was faithful because he loved God, not because God had blessed him so richly. God is sovereign and ultimately in control of everything that happens. Satan cannot do anything unless he has God's "permission". God did not create evil, but in his infinite wisdom He has allowed evil to take place because of sin. One reason is that God had allowed moral evil to test men. He did not want "robots" that simply did what He wanted them to do because of their "programming". God had also allowed physical evil due to the depravity of man, which has consequences.

Ultimately, there is not an answer to these questions which we can fully comprehend. We, as

finite human beings, can never fully understand an infinite God (Rom 11:33-34). God looks at things from an eternal perspective and his thoughts are higher than ours (Isa 55:67). We look at things from an earthly perspective. Why did God put man on earth knowing that Adam and Eve would sin and therefore bring evil, death and suffering on all mankind? Why didn't He just create us all and bring us, all to Heaven where we would be perfect and without suffering? God wants us to have a responsible and meaningful life of fellowship and worship of Him. God had allowed moral evil, to try and refine us, to see if we truly seek and worship God with our hearts.

If we never had to suffer and experience evil, would we truly know the effects of sinfulness and how wonderful God's tender mercies, grace and faithfulness are towards us? God did not create evil, but He allowed it in His own sovereign wisdom and good pleasure (Phil 2:13) and one day we will know why. Let us continue to serve and worship Him, with a sincere volitional fear, gratitude and joy as we await his soon return to triumph over evil finally and judge and rule this world in righteousness, peace, justice and truth.

Jack Sin

At the Pulpit

Theme for the Quarter:

The Christian & Current Spiritual/Moral/Ethical Concerns

Dr Jack Sin

"Rules for a Happy Marriage"

(Eph 5:22-33)

*These hyperlinks work with Word 97 and later version.

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