

Faith Of Our Youth

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"The Voice of Young Christian Faith"

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THE GREAT WORSHIP DEBATE

by Jeremy Morris

It has often been said to me by people from denominations, that the Church of Christ "is dead and has no life. Your members just sit there and don't let the Spirit of God flow through them. They quench the Spirit by being legalistic of the New Testament passages." In turn, some will speak of these denominations as "being outright mad. Their worship service has no order. They jump pews and dance in the aisles while constantly shouting up to God in Heaven." An outsider is easily confused amongst these opposing sides. As followers of God, we must close our lips and open our ears to the Word of God regarding Christian worship.

In John 4:24, Christ said, "God is a spirit, and those that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." It seems to me that the worship of our Creator is a continuum with "Complete Spirit" on one end and "Absolute Truth" on the other. Those who fall on the far end of the Spirit side claim that we can follow God through faith only. He speaks to all of us, and allows us to worship him in our individual manners. Those that fall on the Truth end of this imaginary continuum claim that God set up a specific manner of worship and it must be adhered to

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Jesus "Rocks?"

by Phil Reynolds

Psalm 98: 1: "O sing unto the Lord a new song; for he hath done marvelous things . . ."

Fifteen year ago, "Christian rock" music was a tiny fringe element to the rock 'n' roll scene. Virtually ignored by almost everyone, bands such as Petra and Stryper eked out a living playing at church auditoriums and "concert-in-the-park" fairs. Today, Christian rock is a viable growth industry, with sales and concert receipts approaching a billion dollars a year.

Which left me wondering . . . is this a good thing?

Any fan of current secular "alternative rock" would be hard-pressed not to have noticed the recent definite trend of tongue-in-cheek, blasphemous references to God, usually from a curiously feminist point of view. Tori Amos has a hit song in which she sings

*God, sometimes you just
don't come through;*

*You need a woman to look af-
ter you.*

Joan Osborne's latest album went platinum in sales with a popular single containing the following lyrics:

What if God was one of us?

Just a slob like one of us?

Another band (their name escapes

me) glibly sings, "Tell me all your thoughts on God, because I'm on my way to see her." Such lyrics are obviously evil in nature to the discerning Christian, and certainly don't need to be analyzed here. But what about "Christian" rock; does it offer solace to the rock 'n' roll fan with a conscience?

When I was in high school, the Christian rock band Petra released an album called Beat the System. That album was probably the most popular of its kind at the time, and it contained the only Christian rock hit song that I remember, "God Gave Rock 'n' Roll to You." I was not a Christian then, and didn't find the song offensive morally or spiritually; I simply thought it poor artistically. That was back in 1984, and until recently, I really hadn't heard anything since, choosing not to pay attention.

About five months ago, after hearing of a Christian rock video program on channel 50 in Kansas City, Missouri, and after overhearing the children of some of our brethren in Christ talking about Christian rock music, I got interested again. Finally, upon seeing a bumper sticker, brightly colored with the words "Jesus Rocks," I decided to look into it.

The first thing that struck me was

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from every jot to every tittle.

From my personal study of the scriptures, neither of the above situations is desirable in the sight of God. Those on the Spirit end of the continuum may have some validity in their worship; however, disunity resides in the attitude of "I'm okay, you're okay—let's just praise God." Conversely, those on the Worship end also have distinct advantages; yet, they appear to have reduced Christian worship to a state comparable to a factory job. The worship of our Father and GOD is our greatest duty here on earth and we cannot set it aside unresolved while we ponder and debate other "minor" issues in our individual lives. We must discover, and grasp, the truth in this "Great Worship Debate."

Paul warned Timothy in I Timothy 4:1,2 that *"the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times, some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron . . ."* There was to be a time that man would follow after his own desires and logic regarding the worship of his Father. Man, for some reason, would fail and lose sight of the pattern and be deceived by doctrines whose root is in Satan.

A simple look at a phone book will reveal the thousands of different denominations in the world. "Come worship with us," they cry to all, "Come worship with us to learn about our Lord and Savior." I believe that these latter times are upon us as prophesied by Paul.

So what is a child of God supposed to do? Amidst the beaches of human doctrine, how is a human to find the "diamond in the rough" called the true worship of Him who created us? *"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth"* (II Tim. 2:15). If I am to pass a test in college, I must diligently study the material I am to be tested over. There will be a day where we will all take the test of life—that day is the Judgment Day. We, too, must study to show ourselves worthy of the pearly

gates. Knowledge is only gained by the constant examinations of the scriptures by a steadfast follower of God with a true heart.

In II Tim. 4:3-4, Paul once again tells Timothy, and us, that there will be a time where men will leave sound doctrine to follow after fables. When I think of a fable, I imagine something that appears to be real, but is a crafty mirage. Such are many of the doctrines today. It has often been said, and correctly so, that sin is pleasurable and appealing to the emotion. For if it were not so, then Satan would have no power. I believe that the same principle applies to these "doctrines of devils." If they were not appealing, if they did not "appear" correct, and if people did not place complete faith in them, then there would be one Church as intended by Christ. However, Satan is a master of making a square look round and a falsehood look

matter how minute, will do to our souls.

I affirm that the greatest cry on that dreadful day of the Lord will not be from those that publicly denied Christ and openly treaded on his blood. There will be no question of their fate. The greatest cry will be from those who believed in God and believed that they were doing his will, but, in the end, followed after the shadow of the gospel and heard only the echo of Christ. *"Not everyone that saith unto me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."*

There is a second portion of Christian worship which must be examined. It is this portion that I see my own personal weakness. I have grown up so much with the idea of "if you don't do it by the New Testament ex-

ample, then you're doing it wrong" that my passion for Christ has given way to my intellect. I spend all of my time determining whether or not a certain practice is godly, or what the meaning of this passage is, or defining a word, that I go without prayer or praise to God. There is a place for intellect; however, its place is not where worshipping with the spirit should reside.

Worshipping our God and Father in the

spirit does not imply dancing in the aisles, nor jumping over pews, nor does it insinuate boisterous services as commonly seen today. On the other hand, worshipping in the spirit also does not mean being lifeless, stoic, or unresponsive.

I heard an excellent sermon one time in which the speaker beautifully described the Christian's spiritual side of worship as being internal. In Luke 10:21 we have recorded, *"In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O father, Lord of heaven and earth . . ."* Christians strive to be Christ-like in every manner. Doesn't it make sense that we should rejoice like Christ did? In the above verse, Christ did not shout and dance when he rejoiced, but it says he prayed to God and rejoiced in the spirit. I have never seen people dancing and shout-

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"The worship of our Father and GOD is our greatest duty here on earth and we cannot set it aside unresolved while we ponder and debate other 'minor' issues in our individual lives. We must discover, and grasp, the truth in this 'Great Worship Debate.'"

true.

Many have wondered how close a church must adhere to the New Testament pattern. Is there room for change, deletions, or additions? To answer this, examine with me the hemoglobin molecule in blood. Hemoglobin, the molecule responsible for carrying oxygen throughout the body, is a protein amassed of thousands of amino acids. It is comparable to an essay containing over a thousand words. Sickle-cell anemia, a disorder affecting a sizable portion of the population, is caused when one amino acid is replaced with a different one. This would be comparable to replacing one word in the above mentioned essay and changing the entire meaning. How important is it to completely adhere to the guidelines of the New Testament? If one amino acid can cause this horrible disease, I wonder what following one false doctrine, no

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how much more sophisticated the genre had become in its production values, a definite sign of more money being involved. I found an extreme diversity in scene as well; Christian pop, rock, "young" country, heavy metal, rap and punk are all thriving.

So, after watching a few hours of Christian rock videos, listening to albums and songs by bands such as Audio Adrenaline, Plankeye, DC Talk, Jars of Clay, Petra (They're still around--kind of a Christian version of "classic rock."), Amy Grant and Michael W. Smith, I was reminded of Paul's question in II Corinthians 6:14: *"For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common?"* Apparently, plenty. Same clothes, same tattoos, same hair, same mannerisms, same sneering, arrogant attitude. Even the music itself is extremely derivative, with most of the bands sounding very much like Pearl Jam, Alice in Chains, or Nirvana. The difference, of course, is the lyrics, which contain across the board superficial references to God instead of the usual rock lyrics condoning drug use or illicit sex. That is the only distinction that sets these bands apart as "Christian." Is the distinction an accurate one?

Too often I found the lyrics to be sarcastic and condemning or judgmental in tone, riddled with double entendres, or just plain erroneous in content or message as far as scriptural purity is concerned. For example, the song "Soulmate" by Audio Adrenaline starts with the lyrics, "There is a tremendous lover who would like to share." They're talking about Jesus, get it? Isn't that clever? DC Talk's latest album is called Jesus Freak, a sarcastic reference to a term traditionally used by non-Christians to discredit those with the faith. DC Talk uses the term as a kind of defiant badge of honor. I get the joke, but I find it too cavalier to be showing true reverence. The attitude seems to be "fight fire with fire," a philosophy of the Jews that Jesus came to repeal in Matthew chapter 5.

In my high school and college days, I used to front for a couple of bands, and I know a thing or two about the moods that can be created by various

rhythms and/or melodies. The tone or "feel" of a song can make people happy, sad, depressed, lustful, patriotic, etc. After listening to these Christian rock bands, I couldn't help but notice that the general musical feel of their songs easily fit into the same categories as most secular rock music, specifically, romantic/sexual, angry/aggressive, or party/abandon. Only a few songs actually "sounded" reverential musically.

The Pitchweekly in Kansas City recently ran an article on Christian

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rock, a portion of which reads as follows:

"Though there is an absence of drugs and alcohol, the other constant ever-present in rock music--sex--crackles in the air. Devout or not, when kids and rock 'n' roll combine, the attraction is magnetic. Though youth group counselors and moms and dads swarm the place, there is still an ozone snap in the air and tight blue jeans on stage."

I have to agree. The rhythms, the posturing and the close-ups of smoldering glances at the camera are all there. Christian rock videos are where a lot of this becomes apparent. The video for "Gather at the River," by Point of Grace, features a young man with requisite muscular build, tight jeans, undershirt, tan and long black hair getting into a river with his girlfriend. The song refers to these waters as being the

type one is baptized in, but the not-so-subtle sexual connotation--even as naively as it is presented--is still obvious.

The music videos seem to have two common themes: one, the "let's make fun of foolish sinners" theme, in which the band laughs self-righteously at the "dumb greedy people;" and two, the "your boyfriend will love you better if you turn to God" theme. I can't tell you how many videos featured a teenage girl, alone, crying on her bed at home, thinking about her brooding boyfriend, until at the end of the song they touch a Bible together and are reunited in "spiritual love." What I see then is that most Christian rock videos are appealing to man's baser desires (vanity, lust) to promote God-like values. In other words, "you'll be cool if you love God," or "you'll be sexually desirable if you love God." Aren't these the same values promoted by some of the more sinful music, just replace the words, "if you love God" with "if you party/take drugs/have sex?" Colossians 2:8 says, *"See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ."* I believe that Christian rock music is one such thing fulfilling Paul's warning.

Based on information obtained from interviews of these Christian rock stars from various publications, apparently the label of "Christian" can be a burdensome one as the bands get more exposure. As the bands become more popular, eventually a sort of "glass ceiling" can keep them from greater sales, and several of the groups have been all-too willing to drop the "Christian" label altogether. Mike Herrera, lead vocalist for the group MxPx, has been quoted as saying, "We don't claim to be a Christian band," even though MxPx is marketed as just that. Tooth and Nail, the current predominant Christian rock record label, prefer not to be known as such; A & R man James Morelos has stated, "We don't set ourselves up for that (the label "Christian") or the criticisms that go along with it." I urge all readers to remember Christ's words in Matthew 10:33: *"But whoever disowns*

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