

Drunken Worship Leaders and Mercenary Musicians

If there's anyone in the body of Christ who should be an example of purity of heart and purity of life, it is the **worship** leader, the man or woman who leads God's people into his holy presence. Yet it is increasingly common to hear about worship leaders getting drunk after church services and dropping f-bombs while they boast about their "liberty" in the Lord. Some churches even hire unsaved musicians to play on their worship teams because of their talent. How can this be happening in the house of the Lord?

A few months ago, a young man posted a mocking, irreverent comment on my personal Facebook page. Because I didn't recognize his name, I clicked on his profile to find out more about him, only to be shocked to see that he described himself as a guitar player at a church in Plano, Texas. When I posted a scriptural response to his mocking comment, he explained that he didn't care about Jesus or the Word of God.

I asked him, "But don't you play guitar on a church worship band?"

He replied, "I'm an atheist and don't believe any of this stuff, but my father goes to the church and they needed a guitarist, so they hired me to play."

What? A God-mocking atheist playing guitar on a church worship team? And what happens when they pray together and seek God's heart? Or do they even pray together at all?

Little did I realize that it is becoming more and more common for churches to hire musicians who have no connection to their church—and sometimes no connection to the Lord—to play in their Sunday morning services. Forget about unity in the Spirit. Forget about harmony in the Lord. Forget about

ministering under the anointing. The show must go on!

Oh yes, it's important that we do things with excellence, and I know that a poor musician or an off-key singer or a lousy sound system can drag down a whole service. And as a musician myself, saved as a 16-year-old, heroin-shooting, LSD-using rock drummer in 1971, I fully understand the power of music, especially anointed music. And I believe that the laborer is worthy of his hire and that those who sacrificially serve should be compensated. But I also understand that God hates foreign mixtures, that a little leaven leavens the whole lump, and that the spirit of the world and the Spirit of worship are incompatible.

One of my closest ministry colleagues posted this on his Facebook page last year: "There was a knot in the pit of my stomach this afternoon after I hung up the phone with a friend of mine who pastors a growing church in our city. He relayed to me an anguishing story of how some members from his worship team were hanging out with other worship leaders in a key local church. He reported to me that his team came back from that hang-out experience quite perplexed as the f-bombs were flying from the openly and unashamedly drunk worship leaders."

Another pastor told me that he sent a number of young people from his congregation to train in a ministry school known for its worship. All of them came back to his church with a drinking problem, the result of hanging out with other "worshippers" in the ministry school. And on and on it goes.

It is sobering (no pun intended) to realize that Old Testament priests were not allowed to drink wine or strong drink before going into God's presence to minister. The exact wording was, "Drink no wine or strong drink, you or your sons with you, when you go into the tent of meeting, lest you die..." (Lev. 10:9, ESV).

What was behind this stern warning? We don't know for sure,

but Jewish tradition suggests that Nadab and Abihu, the two older sons of Aaron, were drunk when they offered up unauthorized incense in God's presence and were consumed by his fire and died. (see Lev. 10:1-2, but read Lev. 9:23-24 first. Aaron's sacrifices offered in obedience were consumed by God's fire; Aaron's sons, acting in disobedience, were also consumed by God's fire.) That's why a few verses later God warned Aaron's sons not to drink wine or strong drink before coming into the tent to minister. Is there a lesson here for us?

I'm not getting into the debate of whether it's OK for believers to drink in moderation and I'm not suggesting that we will be struck down and die if we do something wrong during a worship service. But I am saying that God's presence is holy and sacred and we dare not trivialize it with worldly worship leaders and mercenary musicians.

In Exodus 30, God instructed Moses to make a "sacred anointing oil" that would be used to anoint the items of the tabernacle as well as Aaron and his sons (Ex. 30:23-38). This anointing oil was so holy that it could not be poured on the body of a non-priest. In fact, the Law taught that "whoever puts any of it on an outsider shall be cut off from his people" and "whoever makes any like it to use as perfume shall be cut off from his people" (Ex. 30:33, 38). This was for the work of the Lord alone.

Let the worship leaders and singers and band members come out of the secret place, anointed with sacred oil, leading God's people into a fresh encounter with Jesus the Lord. And let carnal performance and fleshly mixtures be gone. We cannot afford to play games with the presence of God (see Heb. 12:25-29).

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