

“Casual Atmosphere, Serious Faith”

David Halbrook

Slogans like this are common because our society focuses on personal comfort. This slogan contrasts *casual* and *serious*. The question this raises is not whether there is a dress code for public worship--there is not (though all dress must be proper, 1 Tim. 2:9-10). The question is---should the atmosphere and focus of public worship be casual or serious?

The answer is found by identifying the purposes of public worship---to please God first and stir up saints (Jn. 4:23; Heb. 10:24-25). Are these casual purposes and actions? If not, why promote a casual atmosphere? Let the atmosphere reflect the focus of pleasing God and stirring up the mind.

Some people view serious as boring (revealing a focus on pleasing self---“I want ___ when I worship!”). Serious is not emotionless but thoughtful producing natural, genuine emotion. Thoughtful worship on each first day of the week produces joy and sorrow when saints break bread in memory of Jesus’ death and gratitude as we give something (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). Serious facts and serious minds produce what kind of atmosphere? Read your Bible or visit our assemblies for the purpose of worshiping God and find out.

Editor’s Note: Our article in *Arkansas Weekly* discusses common attitudes about worship. Like saints in Corinth were influenced by the thinking of their society, we are all influenced by the emphasis of “personal comfort.” Examine yourself and then teach others to keep the focus of worship on God first and on others next.

Simple opportunities to teach the lost and assist each other.

Pray for: Ed & Janice White, The Ledgerwoods, Novela Puckett, Noleka Hopper, Samuel Southall, others with ongoing trials, new Christians among us, and Ben Calderon with whom we fellowship (share) as he works in Conway.

See the scrolling charts for a report on the funds we sent to our Filipino brethren.

Our fall gospel meeting with Donnie Rader is September 13-18.

Join us each Sunday at 10AM (classes), 10:45AM, & 5PM and Wednesday at 7PM.

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The Exhorter

Acts 11:23 *Exhorted them all... cleave unto the Lord*
church of Christ--Quail Valley
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Why "Liberal" and "Conservative" Churches of Christ?

Robert Harkrider

During the past three decades many have asked this question. Some sincere brethren who have been caught up in one stream or another never fully understood, and many who were too young before have now grown to adulthood wondering why. It is therefore a good question worthy of repeated investigation. Labels of "liberal" and "institutional" versus "anti" and "conservative" have been used by some as a prejudicial tool to halt further investigation. Labels used as prejudicial clubs are to be condemned; yet the terms "liberal" and "conservative" are proper when used as adjectives to describe a difference in attitude toward Bible authority, and consequently, a difference in practices. As the years go by, the attitude underlying the division becomes more apparent. We are not separated because one group believes in benevolence and the other does not, nor because of jealousy and envy. We have divided over a basic attitude toward the Bible. A liberal attitude justifies any activity that seems to be a "good work" under the concept, "We do a lot of things for which we have no Bible authority." A conservative attitude makes a plea to have Bible authority (either generic or specific) for all we do - therefore refraining from involving the church in activities alien to that of the church in the New Testament.

Briefly, the walls of innovations which have divided us are built in three areas: WHO? Who is to do the work of the church? The church? Or a human institution? The church has a God-given work to do, and the Lord made the church sufficient to do its own work. Within the framework of elders and deacons, a local church is the only organization necessary to fulfill its mission of evangelism, edification, and benevolence (Eph. 3:10-11; 4:11-16; 1 Tim. 3:15). However, a wedge was driven when some began to reason that the church may build and maintain a separate institution - a different WHO to do the work of the church. This separate institution is

human in origin and control. It is not a church nor governed by the church - yet it receives financial maintenance from the church. Human institutions so arranged (such as benevolent homes, hospitals, colleges or missionary societies) may be doing a good work. But when they become leeches on the church, they deny its independence and all-sufficiency and make a "fund-raising house" of God's church.

HOW? How is the work of the church to be overseen? On a local basis with separate, autonomous congregations? Or may several local churches work as a unit through a sponsoring eldership? The organization of the New Testament church was local in nature, with elders limited to oversight of the work of the flock among them (Acts 14:23; 1 Pet. 5:2; Acts 20:28). We are divided by those who promote "brotherhood works" through a plan of inter-congregational effort with centralized oversight - an unscriptural HOW.

WHAT? What is the mission of the church? Spiritual, or also social? It is in this area that the loose attitude toward the Scriptures is becoming more apparent. Though wholesome activities are needed for all, the Lord died for a higher and holier mission than food, fun, and frolic. Let the church be free to spend its energy and resources in spiritual purposes (1 Pet. 2:5; Rom. 14:17) and let the home be busy in providing social needs (1 Cor. 11:22,34).

Unequally Yoked

L. A. Stauffer

Jehovah, in His covenant with Israel, strictly ordered them to avoid joining, blending, and mixing things that are different (see Lev 19:19; Deut 22:9-11). God forbade yoking an ox with a donkey, weaving flax and wool into the same cloth, and sowing two kinds of seed in the same field. We may not know fully why God issued these laws, but most agree that, in part, it illustrated the need to keep the nation holy-separate from heathens and their unholy practices.

The apostle Paul may allude to this ordinance when writing to brethren who had been known for their unholy alliances with idolatry and immoral practices. To the church at Corinth in his second letter, the apostle wrote: "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers" (2 Cor 6:14).

Paul clarifies his thought with a series of questions: "For what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? Or what communion has light and darkness? And what concord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has a temple of God with idols?" (2 Cor 6:14-16). Christians,

Paul is saying, are to separate themselves from the world of sin and touch no unclean thing (2 Cor 6:17).

The expression "unequally yoked" is one word in the Greek language and combines the words "different" and "yoke." Its precise meaning denotes the tying or binding together of dissimilar things. This occurs when righteousness participates with iniquity, light shares things in common with darkness, and believers engage in the lifestyle of unbelievers. An unequal yoke results when Christians compromise with sin and partake in evil deeds.

Business. This occurs when Christians become partners with non-Christians in business and operate with them on dishonest principles. The "yoke" is not unequal and the partnership is not wrong unless the bond ties the believer to an unclean practice of the unbeliever.

Marriage. Unequal yokes develop in marriages when believers bound to unbelievers join their mates in unrighteous behavior. The Christian may sign a deceitful income tax return, drink a few beers at a New Year's Eve party, engage in a night of dancing with friends, or don immodest apparel for a beach party. The "yoke" of marriage is not of itself unequal-for marriage is sacred, joined by God, and each is sanctified in the other (see 1 Cor 7:14).

Denominationalism. A disciple may for a legitimate reason choose to visit services of a religious group that teaches and practices false doctrine. Even Paul attended the synagogues. And when invited the person, as I have done, might speak the truth. This Paul did. But to blend our voices in unscriptural singing or to contribute money to support false teachers and unauthorized practices is to yoke oneself unequally by endorsing and having fellowship with sin. To give them greeting in bidding them Godspeed is to share in their evil deeds (see (2 John 10-11).

Friends. "Friends of the world" is not equivalent to "friendship of the world" (see James 4:4). Paul accepts association or company with fornicators, covetous, idolaters, etc. that are of the world (1 Cor 5:9-10). But to engage with them in their sins is friendship with the world itself and it creates "enmity with God" (James 4:4). Evil companions can corrupt good morals and when they do our company with them has become an unequal yoke and must cease. Both young and old need to be reminded not to walk in the counsel of the ungodly, stand in the way of sinners, and sit in the seat of scoffers (see Psa 1:1).

Christians are in the midst of the world to let their lights shine before the world of ungodly and wicked men. They are to abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul and are to be seen as lights in a crooked and perverse age (Matt 5:16; 1 Pet 2:11;

Phil 2:15). And we cannot do this when we yoke ourselves unequally to the world in perverse practices.