

“Let’s Party”

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It has finally come to this. A few years ago, a brother asserted that worship should be a party, a “celebration” (Marvin Phillips, speech at Nashville, TN “Jubilee,” July 1989). He also ridiculed the “tradition” of the five avenues of worship and justified the use of “special music” in worship (e.g., solos, choirs, and professional entertainment groups—especially “Acappella,” and “Gospel-Rockers”).

Incredibly, he used the occasion of the return of the prodigal son (Luke 15) as his “proof text.” The “party” the father threw upon the return of his son allegedly suggests “partying” in worship. While it still shocks me that anyone claiming to be a Gospel preacher would thus openly advocate aping Pentecostalism in worship, we should not be too surprised in this case, due to this brother’s several previous compromises.

Turning our worship to God into a “party” is grievously wrong on many counts.

1. It degrades the true and living God who is to be hallowed (Mat.6:9) and before Whom we are to come “decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40).
2. God condemned the Corinthians for turning their worship assemblies into a banquet of food for the body, a “party” –such behavior belongs **outside** of the worship assembly, not in it (1 Cor. 11:20–34).
3. To advocate a “party” atmosphere in worship evinces a misconception of the purpose of worship. Worship is primarily to honor and glorify God—it must concentrate on God and what He desires. The “partying” devotees are narcissistic, concentrating on themselves, what pleases them, and what will draw the crowds.
4. The “party” atmosphere appeals to the fleshly rather than to the spiritual inclinations of men.
5. It is both absurd and dangerous to treat the mere “drapery” of a parable as if it had an enduring application. While the rejoicing of the father over the return of his son represents the joy of our Father when His sinful children repent, the “party” in the parable is mere “drapery” to make the parable “true to life.” It is **totally unwarranted** to identify this incidental detail with a worship assembly of the church.

Will this “party/worship” advocate be consistent? If so, he needs also to insist that:

1. Every Christian who repents should be given a “best” robe, a ring, and shoes (Luke 15:22)
2. We serve a banquet of choice beef in our worship assemblies (v.23)
3. We have “music [likely instrumental] and dancing” in our worship assemblies (v. 25; brother Phillips would likely have no problem with these items).

While we agree that our hearts should be filled with joy and thanksgiving in our worship as we contemplate the glory and benevolence of God, these emotions are very different from the idea that worship is or should be a “party.” Our erring brother needs to ponder more fully the necessity of worshiping God in “spirit and truth” (John 4:23–24).

[**Note:** I wrote this article for and it was published in *The Lighthouse*, weekly bulletin of Northpoint Church of Christ, Denton, TX, July 4, 2010, of which I was editor.]

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