

The “Sloppy Syndrome”

Dub McClish

I preached in a Gospel meeting a few years ago where I had not been before. I was told in advance by the preacher that the brethren were “laid back” in the way they dressed for worship. He meant that several of those who had leading parts in the worship and were up before the assembly (song leaders, prayer leaders, those waiting on the Lord’s table, etc.) would be very casually dressed. Actually, “laid back” was not quite the right term—careless and sloppy more accurately described what I saw. I preached in a meeting in another place (a church with several hundred members) where the brethren used a different song leader almost every time we met. Two or three of them wore neither coat nor tie. One poor fellow looked like he had just come in from cutting firewood (wearing blue jeans, sneakers, an ugly open-collared shirt and a distracting scraggly beard). He was also tone-deaf.

If this was the best these congregations or these individual brethren could do, they are certainly not deserving of criticism, but it obviously was not in either case. Why brethren will spend \$1,000-\$1,500 on a Gospel meeting effort to get outsiders to come and then demonstrate such sloppiness, carelessness and unconcern before their guests I do not understand. What must such totally unnecessary nonchalance say to visitors? If a congregation’s best song leader cannot sing, it should bring in a man who can. If they have one man who is a good song leader and others who are not so good, the best one should most certainly be used. Where is the wisdom of using some brother who wants to lead singing (regardless of how good he is otherwise) who can hardly carry a tune thus seriously detracting from the main purpose of the meeting—preaching the Truth?

I could not picture any of the men who dressed so sloppily on these occasions dressing this way for a funeral of a friend or for their important business activities. Yet, here they were, representing the most important cause on earth, and saying by their appearance that it wasn’t even worth dressing up for. It is difficult to imagine what elders are thinking of when they encourage such sloppiness by calling on brethren whom they know to be so careless without insisting that they be more serious about the Lord’s work. I am not advocating that the worship hour be turned into a male fashion show, but surely those men who lead the congregation should dress in such a way that they will indicate to those assembled that they consider spiritual things to be of utmost importance. Let us be more careful to do all things “decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40).

[**Note:** I wrote this article for and it was published in *The Edifier*, weekly bulletin of Pearl Street Church of Christ, Denton, TX, May 26, 1988, of which I was editor.]

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