

“LET’S PARTY”

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It has finally come to this. In July 1989, a brother asserted that worship should be a party, a “celebration” (Marvin Phillips, speech at the Nashville, TN “Jubilee”). In the course of his lecture, he also ridiculed the “tradition” of the five Scripture-authorized avenues of worship and justified the use of “special music” in worship (e.g. solos, choirs, and or professional entertainment groups - especially “Acappella” and “The 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 wayward son allegedly suggests “partying” in worship. This misapplication is so far fetched and foolish and is such a perversion of the parable that it would occur only to a dedicated innovator. While it still shocks me that anyone claiming to be a Gospel preacher would thus openly advocate engaging in such hyper-emotional Holy-Rollerism in worship, we should not be too surprised in this case, due to this brother’s long history involving compromise and error.

Let’s study this irreverent interpretation a bit. 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 (**Matthew 6:9**) and before Whom we are to worship “DECENTLY AND IN ORDER” (**I Corinthians 14:40**).
2. God condemned the Corinthians for turning their worship assemblies into a “party”—a banquet of food for the body. Such behavior belongs **outside** of the worship assembly, not in it (**I Corinthians 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 and His Son—it must concentrate on that which Deity desires and authorizes as pleasing to Him (**Colossians 3:17**). The “partying” devotees are narcissistic, concentrating on themselves, what pleases them and makes them “feel good,” 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.

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

1. Every Christian who repents 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 rejoicing 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 and the many who apparently indulge in the same sort of unbiblical foolishness need to ponder more fully the meaning of worshiping God in “SPIRIT AND TRUTH” (**John 4:23-24**). The “party” idea for worship is not in the right spirit and ignores the Truth of God’s Word for Scriptural worship.