

WHAT ABOUT PRAISE TEAMS?

More and more congregations in the churches of Christ are using what is called "Praise Teams". Such teams are usually a collection of 4, 6, or 8 of the most capable singers in the congregation (representing the 4 part harmony of our hymns) to either: (1) Stand before the congregation with their microphones, to LEAD the congregation in it's worship in song, or (2) Be placed in strategic places in the congregation, so as to LEAD the congregation in singing. Usually, at least 2 of these parts involve women, who stand before, or stand out in such a way as to portray their leadership role. The denominations of the world have long provided music for their members through choirs that stand before them, that virtually do ALL the singing. Those not in the choir are the less talented, and do very little singing, even when given the opportunity. The practice of "praise teams" is but a borrowed practice of denominationalism. In the OT, the Israelites wanted to be "like the nations" around them, and in doing so, they rejected God and brought about His wrath (1 Sam. 8:4-7). It is said that "praise teams" are but a contemporary "choir". Those who are placed before a congregation (perhaps, even behind the pulpit) are visibly leading the congregation. If women can scripturally do this, what is to keep them from visibly sharing in the serving of communion, or in the public presentation of a sermon? One preaching professor in Abilene Christian University had his wife read HIS sermon before a public audience several years ago. Did not Paul forbid the women to teach OR usurp authority over the men (1 Tim. 2:12)? To say the least, the use of women in such roles is a compromise of the leadership role of men.

What about the "fruit" of such practices? The introduction of such a practice as "praise teams" has been divisive in the brotherhood, and its practice has been virtually confined to very *liberal* congregations (who have compromised scriptural principles in various other ways, especially in doctrine and fellowship with neighboring Protestant denominations. Some are sharing worship WITH denominations, and meeting in each other's buildings for these joint sessions, even where the instrument is used. Even in congregations that USE "praise teams", many not-so-talented singers are prone to just sit (or stand) and "listen" to the *superior* melody of the praise team, who are virtually performing in concert. This even creates an emotional barrier between the 2 groups of singers, though they are in the same gathering. The better singers are given this role over others. Rather than being "active" in singing and making melody to one another (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16, 17), some become "passive".

In Jer. 32:35, God condemned the actions of some for NOT doing what He had commanded, AND doing things that had not come into His mind. The scripture contains the mind of God revealed to man, and obviously "praise teams" never came into His mind, for there are no instructions, commands, or examples of it for us. Strange that it took over 2000 years to explore the mind of God to figure out that it has His approval. But, someone says, "I like it", but that does not mean GOD likes it. Remember Luke 16:15, "Ye are they that justify yourselves before men, but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God".

More and more churches of Christ are following the example of Israel, in wanting to be "like the *denomi*-nations" around them. Our worship is NOT to please ourselves, but the Lord (John 4:23, 24; Gal. 1:10). Where is ANY authority for such an innovation? Nadab and Abihu offered "strange fire" before the Lord (which HE had not commanded), and God rejected it, and cause fire to come out of the altar and take their lives (Lev. 10:1,2). Let's learn from this (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:6-12). One supporter of "praise teams" (Joe Ed Furr) has publicly declared that "praise teams in many churches may be

a short-lived fad". It is admitted that praise teams have become the church choir, and congregational singing is greatly diminished. Older members are more troubled than are the younger. We need to remember how the older Israelites warned Rehoboam to lighten up on the taxation of the people, while the younger urged him to make it hard on the people (1 Kings 12). As a result, the nation was divided. WHY should the innovating youth directors and associate ministers insist on beginning congregational "choirs", and letting the older members fall over the stumbling block that THEY (the younger ones) have placed there? Paul said he would even eat no meat if it caused a brother to stumble (1 Cor. 8:13). None should ever "put a stumblingblock, or an occasion to fall in his brother's way" (Rom. 14:13). "for, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another" (Gal. 5:13). Let us all endeavor to keep the peace, for God is not the author of confusion, but of peace (1 Cor. 14:33). Some say, "well, the church of Christ is changing"--but is it for the better or the worse? We know the church changed before, by "falling away" and giving heed to false doctrines, in spite of the warnings from God (1 Tim. 4:1-3). Will history show that this happened again in the 21st century? Let's have the courage to stand for truth.

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