Sunday, November 8, 2026 am

WHAT GOD HAS NOT JOINED TOGETHER (9)
The Church and Entertainment

Today, we resume our 2026 theme, What God has (and has NOT) joined together. We devoted the first half of this year noting some things God has joined together that man has separated – e.g., man and woman for life (Matthew 19:9), salvation and obedient works, salvation and baptism, There are things the world believes to be acceptable, but when you study God's word, Christ and His church, etc. The second half of the year we have been noting some things God has NOT joined together though man often says differently. We have noted how the Biblical account of creation is not compatible with macroevolution, fellowship with unbelievers, the denominations as the church, women as leaders in the local church, light and darkness.

Today, we want to address how God has NOT joined together entertainment as a work of the church.

I. Some preliminary observations

a. In our lives there is a place for wholesome entertainment. Recreation is a good thing and needed from time to time. The very idea of the word recreation involves recreating something – restoring our vitality.

b. But is it a work of the church to entertain either in or outside or worship? Yet there are many churches today who have made entertainment and social involvement their primary focus. The worship service is transformed into a concert like environment with a sprinkling of the Bible in its message. Churches, often in the name of opening the door to evangelize offer entertainment of all sorts including holiday activities (plays, "trunk or treat" gatherings, etc.), social gatherings and meals to encourage togetherness (in the name of fellowship), recreational facilities and programs of all sorts (in the name of edification – the building up of the whole man). NOTE: I do NOT question the good intentions of such things, especially in light of what the godless of the world offer as an alternative. BUT the real question is, is it authorized? ***Has God joined together such things with His pattern for the church***?

c. Entertainment as a focus of the church is a product of the social gospel. A movement begun in the late 1800s and developed in the early 1900s prior to WWI. It was born out of liberal theology which prioritized ethics over doctrinal concerns. It was a movement that viewed "social sins" – poverty, irresponsible wealth and impoverished living conditions as immorality equal to our individual sins. The goal of the movement was to make the focus of the church about curing social ills (some of it believing this was needed to prepare for the premillennial return of Jesus – another false doctrine).[1]

d. [2]NOTE: This attitude about the gospel being man centered (human needs over spiritual needs) is one of the motivations behind the church turning to entertainment. Observing what churches that seeks to justify entertainment as a means of carrying out the church's work appeal to it being an opportunity to introduce the gospel to the lost AND to provide resources to keep them engaged. Thus, many churches incorporate into their work (aka "ministries") of social relief – general benevolence, social activism (pollical), and providing "wholesome" alternatives to the entertainment of the world.

II. The church and entertainment

a. Understanding the work of the church –

---

[1] These thoughts were developed using Logos Bible Software © resources based on a "Smart search" (AI based) about the Social Gospel.

[2] My observations based on various resources, churches and organizations that promote entertainment as a work of their churches.

i. <u>What is the church</u>? As we have noted on many occasions, the church is the body of the saved. In its ***universal*** sense it describes anyone whom God has added to His family, both past and present. Those whose names are registered in heaven (Hebrews 12:23). ***Locally***, it is a body of the saved in a given location who join together to do the work God has given us to do collectively. The local church is about furthering the cause of Christ and strengthening its members ***spiritually***. That is the CLEAR focus as it is addressed in the New Testament.

ii. <u>What works of the church are described in the New Testament</u>? As you study congregations in the New Testament, their work can be categorized in 4 different areas: 1) Evangelism – reaching the lost; 2) Edification – building up the saints spiritually (cf. Ephesians 4:11-16), 3) Benevolence – the temporal relief of truly needy saints (only – cf. 1 Timothy 5:3-16), and 4) Worshipping God – John 4:24, 1 Corinthians 14, etc.). Each of these works has a pattern established thought command, example and necessary conclusion.

iii. <u>Must we respect God's pattern</u>? An underlying thread throughout the Bible is our need to respect God's word. Whatever He tells us to do, or NOT to do, we are obligated to submit to Him. Colossians 3:17. Matthew 7:21-23 – Jesus was clear about this. 1 Corinthians 4:6, Paul told the brethren, *Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other*. When God sets boundaries, we need to respect His boundaries.

b. The nature of worship in the Bible

i. From the beginning, worship has always been about glorifying God.

ii. John 4:24 as Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman He declared that we worship Him "in spirit and in truth". This involves following God's pattern in what we do.

iii. Digging deeper into worship, God has always specified HOW to worship Him AND challenged those who worshipped Him differently.

1. Genesis 4:1-5 necessarily concludes that God had give specific instructions about HOW to worship Him. Abel followed those instructions and Cain did NOT.
2. Exodus 20:1-10 records the first 4 commandments. Consider the first commandment, worship ME only! The 2nd – no graven images of any kind. When Israel made the golden calf they were NOT necessarily worshipping a different God. Exodus 32:4-5 notes that Arron made a proclamation to consecrate a feast to the LORD (YHWH). It was still VERY wrong because they disobeyed God! They broke commandment #2.
3. With the constructing of the tabernacle and establishing the priesthood God was VERY clear about how to worship Him. Leviticus 10:1-3 notes that Nadab and Abihu did NOT follow His directions.
4. With the building of the tabernacle, God was clear, "See that you make it according to the pattern" (Exodus 25:9, 40, 26:30); Ex.39-40 notes that Moses did "as the LORD had commanded" at least 15 times. Leviticus records the phrase at least 12x.
5. The Hebrew writer appeals back to this noting that God had something better (His church and Christ) in mind. (Heb. 8:5)

iv. We have clear instructions about every act of worship in the New Testament. A deeper study of each shows the spiritual aspect of our worship! It is about glorifying God – as we sing and pray together (1 Corinthians 14:15) partake of the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-26ff, Acts 20:7), giving – 1 Cor. 16:1-2, 2 Corinthians 9:6-8; teaching God's word – Acts 20:7, etc. STUDY the acts of worship in detail, you will NOT find entertainment being its pattern or purpose. And that should end the discussion!

c. Thoughts in scripture

i. <u>The silence of scripture</u>! The problem with the social gospel is that we do not find it ANYWHERE in the New Testament. The church in Acts was about proclaiming Christ through the gospel. The letters to churches and church leaders were centered in spiritual growth in Christ. Nothing more! <u>You do not find them advocating or engaging in entertainment</u>, "catering to the whole man", or seeking to relieve the social ills of society.

ii. <u>Jesus cleansed the temple</u>, twice (John 2:13-25, Matthew 21:12-13). They had turned God's holy place into a house of merchandise and a den of thieves. The place God had consecrated to worship Him properly they had turned it into something for THEIR benefit above serving God. I am not convinced that Jesus would approve of how worshipping Him has been catered to imitate worldly music styles and themes.

iii. <u>What is edification Biblically</u>?

1. One of the arguments made to justify entertainment, whether in worship or outside of worship is that it is a work of edification. Brethren that build "fellowship halls" and host secular functions in their buildings often do so in the name of building up the brethren.
2. But the use of edify in the NT is related to building one up spiritually (cf. Ephesians 4:11-16, 1 Corinthians 14:12, etc.), unless it is speaking of a physical building. It is not about eating in the building or turning worship into entertainment. Consider 1 Corinthians 11:22. The church had turned the Lord's Supper into a common meal. Paul's response – EAT AT HOME! He even repeats that in vs. 34. The Lord's Supper is NOT a social gathering.

iv. <u>What is fellowship Biblically</u>?

1. The word *fellowship* in the NT means joint participation. A challenge we have with this word in our society is that one of its definitions is about sharing anything together.
2. The AHD defines the term as: 1. The companionship of individuals in a congenial atmosphere and on equal terms. 2. Friendship; comradeship; 3. A close association of friends or equals sharing similar interests.
3. And while there is an element of that in its Biblical use, in the NT the term is ALWAYS applied to spiritual conduct – joint participation in acts of worship (1 Corinthians 10:16) or our relationship with God and one another (1 John 1:3-7, Acts 2:42, Galatians 2:9, etc.)

v. Is there a distinction between what an individual and the church can do?

1. Another concern with this is confusing the distinction between what an individual can do and what we can do as the Lord's church. Some have argued that anything an individual can do, the church can as a collective. And since we can pursue wholesome entertainment individually, get together socially in our homes, it is acceptable to do so as a church.
2. But that fails to make a distinction that is clearly defined in the NT. For example: 1 Timothy 5:16 dealing with caring for the needy (another lesson), Paul makes a distinction between what an individual can (must) do and the church.

d. Some problems associated with entertainment in worship or as a work of the church.

i. <u>It is superficial</u> – it appeals to emotions. It is about feelings over substance. The performance on stage is what "moves" the audience rather than the convicting power of the gospel – Romans 1:16.

ii. <u>It is man centered</u>. It makes worship about what I want over what God wants. Many of the mega churches today offer multiple services and venues where you can choose the style of worship you want. Paul in Acts 17:24-25 noted that God is not worshipped with man's hands.

Recall what Jesus said to the Pharisees who had made their traditions binding – Matthew 15:6-9.

iii. How many choose a church based upon what it offers them above whether or not it stands true to God's word?

iv. <u>It cheapens to primary intent of worship</u> – to glorify God. Recall Leviticus 10:3, *And Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord spoke, saying: 'By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified.' "* Paul described idolatry as exchanging the truth for a lie and worshipping and serving the creature rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25)

v. <u>It changes the way God says to worship</u>. Entertainment driven worship and actions change the very nature of worship and His church. The worship God prescribes involves us participating together (singing, communion, praying and listening to God's word, etc.). Entertainment worship is a performance first.

vi. <u>Rarely will it lead one to Christ</u>. If it takes emotional and sensual worship to bring one in the door, what will it take to keep them there? Is it possible that someone will become serious and believe genuinely? Sure. However, I contend that likely they had a heart that would have obeyed the gospel if taught properly and without the fluff. It is the heart that has to change!

Concluding thoughts: We could say more about these things. When we worship God properly, we do benefit from it. We are edified. God, in His wisdom, established it that way. But let us understand that God has NOT joined together true worship and His church with entertainment. Why are you here? Think about it!