

## WORSHIP AND PREACHING: DO WE REALLY KNOW HOW TO DO CHURCH?

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*(Note: although some readers may remember this question from previous articles, this is a new article which addresses the subject of worship and preaching.)*

Recently, I was visiting with a friend. He shared an observation from an acquaintance outside the churches of Christ: "You guys have the best preaching around but you just don't know how to do church." I do not take that as a blanket affirmation that every sermon I preach is great, but I also believe that we in churches of Christ generally have very good preaching. We respect the word, we wrestle with the word, and in the struggle we learn and grow and apply the word of God to real life situations.

Of more interest to me is the second part of the statement—you just don't know how to do church. When I shared this statement with a sister in Christ recently, she asked, "What do think that means?" Let me suggest some possible answers.

Most of our churches are stuck in a relatively unchangeable pattern of worship activities that can be little changed without major disruption. Those who have fresh ideas and applications are usually disempowered by our leadership models. Our church dynamics are flawed--we do most things for ourselves. We seem to have little awareness of how spiritual realities and activities might be designed to appeal to visitors. Many churches around us have sold out to attracting visitors with entertainment, stunts, and the spectacular. We must seek to discover how spiritual meaning is communicated to those unfamiliar with the word of God and spiritual realities. If we have great preaching, I would say it is mostly for us, and that we have little idea about how to preach the gospel in today's post-modern world. We are embarrassed to offer the invitation, do not know what we want our hearers to do as a result of the sermon, and are equally embarrassed at times about God's desire for a specific kind of response. We are not committed to using people according to their gifts.

We need to sharpen our understanding of the essential nature of baptism so that people do not delay until it is convenient. I believe we are more and more in churches of Christ baptizing for church membership rather than as a clear indication that salvation has come to another soul.

In most places, we need to work on making the worship experience meaningful and rich and spiritual. There is little reason to greet people well if they will leave disillusioned as a result of other aspects of their visit with us.

Life is not easy, but our compromised positions do not help us do church effectively, maintaining high commitment demands. I know I am idealistic, and it takes a long time to move a large ship, but sometimes when I visit in sister congregations, I feel as though I have stepped back in my spiritual life 20-25 years.

May God help us find fresh faith and vitality in our shared worship as we seek to shine as lights in a world of darkness.