

## **“Brethren, We Have Met to Worship”**

(Some Thoughts on Corporate Worship  
Among Fundamental Congregations)

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“Brethren, we have met to worship  
And adore the Lord our God;  
Will you pray with all your power,  
While we try to preach the word?  
All is vain unless the Spirit  
Of the Holy One comes down;  
Brethren, pray, and holy manna  
Will be showered all around.”

Yes, the brethren are to meet together and worship. However, because of some minor differences in outward expressions of worship, even among fundamental separatist congregations, worship can become strained and divisive. There are some differences in outward expressions of worship among Christians, even within the parameters of fundamentalism, which need to be addressed in this study, so we might continue to be unified in our worship in fundamental churches.

When I say differences, I don't mean contemporary music verses non-contemporary music, or New Evangelical philosophy of compromise versus Fundamentalist Separatism. True Fundamentalism will never bow the knee to worldly music (Rom. 12:2). However, there are some minor differences among fellow fundamentalists regarding some outward expressions and certain styles of worship. I am referring to some outward expressions in worship that vary according to culture and upbringing within fundamental camps. One of these expressions are hand gestures or hand movements during times of singing, which today is considered to be charismatic by some fundamentalists, while not by others. Other things, such as possessing a more laid back, or relaxed approach, and a non-contemporary southern flavor to some music and worship, might also be brought under this same umbrella of different expressions within the realm of acceptable worship.

Then there is the use of such things as background music, livelier music (not rock beat music), and even the singing or use of Christmas hymns, which in some fundamentally reserved congregations is not practiced. In addition, some fundamental churches steer away from all drama-related presentations in their primary worship services, while others recognize there may be a proper place for puppets, dramatized Bible stories, and artistic presentations in connection with children's ministries.

We must recognize that there are more reserved approaches to ministry in some fundamentalist congregations. There are some congregations that are cultured differently, which may make it necessary for us to limit certain outward expressions of worship in our times of fellowship and assembly life, so we might dwell together in "one accord" (Acts 2:46). Therefore, those who join a fundamental church or come to present a ministry should know the worship standards of the local fundamental church. Out of love and respect we should be willing to adapt and possess a serving spirit toward the brethren, so that God's saints are not offended in the times of corporate worship, but built up, encouraged, and unified. This should be our goal.

Brethren, we have met to worship. But we must do so out of love, understanding, and with a servant's heart. We gather together to ask the Lord's blessing. Since this is true we must learn the secret of sometimes limiting our expression of worship so we might not offend the brethren.

Below are some thoughts on these differences in worship and how ministry can still take place within those fundamental churches and circles that tend to be more reserved in their approach to worship. In this study, we will learn that we can possess a loving, servant's heart toward the saints and minister to them (Heb. 6:10) without offence, while sometimes limiting minor outward expressions in our worship, as we place ourselves under the authority of a local pastor (Heb. 13:17) and the accepted standards of worship in a local church ministry.

There needs to be submission, humility, and a servant's heart in this area today. 1 Peter 5:5 says we are to "be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." Let us remember this important principle. We should strive to be a blessing and not a blight to the congregations we join and in which we minister.

There are six thoughts regarding worship that will help us to stay unified in our fundamental services.

## **1. Internal Worship**

One point to consider is this, we can worship God in the stillness of our heart, without any outward hand or expressive movements, or a specific style of singing and worship. This does not mean that outward expression and showing feelings during times of worship is wrong. We can't worship God without expressing our emotion and feeling. God does not expect us to look like we have just bitten into a lemon when we worship Him. However, we must remember that all true worship happens on the inside of a person's heart.

Think about Psalm 4:4:

“Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah.”

Actually, I have found these are the best times of worship – silent times. How wonderful it is to just be still and know that He is God (Ps. 46:10). In a still small voice God speaks to us (1 Kings 19:12 – “a still small voice”). Since we can worship God in the stillness and silence of our heart, which is the true center and place of worship, we can choose to limit the expression of our worship in some small way, and at certain times, without limiting our ability to worship God. This is because we worship God “in spirit and truth” (John 4:24) - not by mere outward expressions or a certain style of music.

The “inner man” (Eph. 3:16) and “the hidden man of the heart” (1 Pet. 3:4) is the place of all true worship. This means we won't be phony (unreal) just because we sometimes place ourselves under local church authority and humbly limit certain outward hand expressions, a style of worship, or some livelier song in our time of worship, for the sake of not offending God's saints. This is because outward expression is not where true worship occurs. The true worship takes place on the inside of a person's heart.

All fundamentalists would agree that those who become enamored or carried away with mere mechanical movements of worship (Matt. 6:7) are missing the point of true Biblical worship which occurs on the inside of the heart. Outward expression, in and of itself, is not true worship, but is merely

the outflow of all true worship, which occurs in the heart (Ps. 77:6). Therefore, we are not worshipping any less just because we limit, in some small way, our particular expression or style of worship during a church meeting. Nor are we limiting who we are in worship experience, since who we really are, is linked to the inward, and not the outward person (“the inward man is renewed day by day” – 2 Cor. 4:16).

One must also remember that our expressions of worship and feelings can also be controlled or brought under subjection, without limiting our ability to worship God or smothering and stifling our worship, since all true worship occurs inwardly.

Consider 1 Corinthians 14:32:

“And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.”

The prophets were able to bring their “spirits” under control. In other words, the place where emotion, decision, and worship originate was to be brought under control in their stated meetings. In short, the inward place of worship (the spirit) should always be subject to the person who is worshipping. Like the prophets, we can control how we worship, and still worship God with a genuine and sincere heart. We can place certain limitations on our time of worship and still be genuine in our time of worship.

We must also remember that when we think we need a certain outward expressive action to truly worship God, then we are missing the point of true worship, which is to give back worth to God (1 Chron. 16:29; Ps. 29:2). In short, we don’t need a specific expression of worship in order to worship God, since worshipping God is all about Him and not us. Let us not forget this. We don’t want to fall into the contemporary music trap that says it’s impossible to worship if we can’t have it our way! Worship is not like a fast food restaurant, a Burger King, which uses the slogan – “Have it Your Way.” We never *need* have it our way to worship God. This mindset actually becomes a self-based type of worship and misses the whole purpose of worship which is to give back worth to God and minister to the saints.

William Bright

“And now the wants are told, that brought  
Thy children to thy knee;

Here, lingering still, we ask for naught  
But simply worship thee.”

## 2. Servant Worship

Here is another valid point. We should be willing to limit our corporate expressions in worship in order to be a *servant* of others. This is a Biblical axiom or truth. Sometimes fundamentalists must apply the principles of liberty, love, and limitation to their times of worship so they might function together and minister to each other without offence.

Galatians 5:13 gives this principle:

“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only *use* not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.”

Yes, by love serve one another! What a wonderful principle this is to apply to all of our living and worship. Following this principle, we can choose to limit our outward expression of worship at times, so as to not offend others, but build them up and encourage them in their Christian living as we come together for ministry (Heb. 10:25). *Limiting our worship in some small way is not a matter of compromise with the saints but loving them!* This is true even within the parameters of Fundamentalism. What a different perspective this can give regarding ministry. There should be a willingness to limit our liberty at times in order to love and serve the brethren in the area of ministry and worship.

There is an old tried and true statement which bears repeating. It goes like this:

“In essentials unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.”

Even Fundamentalists need to remember this! Yes, we may have the liberty to be more expressive in our worship, without becoming contemporary, but remember that ministry and service to others is more important than our liberty, and choosing to limit ourselves for the benefit of the body of Christ in certain fundamentally reserved churches, is more important than our liberty. The Bible makes this very clear. We should choose to limit our liberty for the sake of Christian ministry and opportunity for service.

Romans 14:20 declares:

“For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence.”

We might put it in this perspective. Don't destroy your usefulness and effectiveness in ministry by causing a simple hand gesture or more energetic style of music to get in the way of ministry. Learn the lesson of limiting yourself, if necessary, so the saints who think differently will not be offended. This is love and this is ministry.

1 Corinthians 10:32

“Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God.”

If we truly love the brethren and want to serve them, we should remember to be a servant to the brethren, even in our time of corporate worship.

“Make me a servant  
Humble and meek  
Lord let me lift up those who are weak.  
And may the prayer of my heart  
Always be,  
Make me a servant,  
Make me a servant,  
Make me a servant today.”

### **3. Reserved Worship**

It must be understood that even within Fundamentalism there are some different expressions of worship that may be acceptable without crossing over the line into charismatic and contemporary worship. However, since in the charismatic cultural expression of worship there is hand raising, along with contemporary music and chaos, some more reserved congregations have steered away from all hand movements in worship. Also, in light of the epidemic of entertaining music more reserved fundamentalists have chosen to be more selective and careful in certain mannerisms and expressions of worship.

Here are some reasons why:

- The association principle with the charismatic culture (1 Thess. 5:22).
- The association principle with the entertainment world (1 Cor. 14:40; Eph. 6:6; Matt. 23:5).

Although these principles are not viewed by all fundamentalists as applicable to certain expressions in worship (hand gestures, Biblical drama presentations, clapping the hands), there needs to be an understanding and working together in this area, so all the saints in fundamental circles can build each other up, instead of discouraging one another. Some fundamental congregations simply choose what they believe to be the *safer path* or more *reserved path* when it comes to worship. Therefore, they choose to limit certain types of outward expressions in their corporate gatherings of worship.

The more reserved congregations do not comply with any style of hand raising or hand gestures in the area of singing, or music ministry, nor do they promote the arts or the outward production and expression of drama-related stories in their primary church services. Within each congregation there may be some variation regarding what is acceptable in relationship to adult meetings and meetings geared around children's ministries. Therefore, those involved in ministry should understand the church's position on these various issues and seek to abide under the leadership of the local church.

Hebrews 13:17

“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.”

The point is this; less expressive worship (not dry and dead worship) in some fundamental churches is used as a *preventative measure* to keep certain patterns from developing. A simple list may suffice at this point.

According to the worship standards of some churches, less expressive worship can:

- Prevent a worldly atmosphere from developing in the church (Rom. 12:2).

- Keep a church from embracing an entertainment philosophy in their ministry (Acts 2:42).
- Maintain a certain order or decorum which can prevent patterns of leniency and disrespect from surfacing (1 Cor. 14:40).
- Establish a standard pattern of reverence in the Lord's house (Ps. 89:7).
- Declare a stand in the best possible light (Phil. 1:10).
- Cause saints to function together as a loving and considerate body (Gal. 5:13).

The outward practice of eliminating drama-related practices in church services and maintaining a less expressive approach to worship in more reserved churches, such as the raising of hands, the use of hand gestures, or the use of a more southern style of music is a corporate stand which some churches choose to take. This is done in order to demonstrate that the church is not going to waiver or move toward charismatic worship, contemporary worship, and the direction of entertainment in their services (Rev. 3:11; Josh. 1:7).

The continued observance and practice of a less expressive approach to worship in some churches will many times be used as a standard to demonstrate that a church is going to remain non-charismatic, non-contemporary, non-entertaining, non-compromising, non-pragmatic, non-conforming, and non-trendy in its overall philosophy and approach to ministry and Bible teaching.

Philippians 2:3 says:

“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.”

What a great reminder this is for all of us as fellow fundamentalists. As we come together in worship we should not want to knowingly do anything that would create strife or division in our midst. This should especially be true in the context of our worship. When we remember to “esteem each other better than ourselves,” we are really humbling ourselves toward others, not



lording ourselves over them, and attempting to cause unwarranted strife and division in a congregation.

“Then, let each esteem his brother  
Better than himself to be;  
And let each prefer another  
Full of love, from envy free;  
Happy are we,  
When in this we all agree.”

#### **4. Edifying Worship**

Think of this also. When you come into a congregation you come there to build up that congregation and not cause grief through miniscule differences in styles or outward expressions of worship.

1 Corinthians 14:12 reminds us of the edification principle when it says:

“Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.”

The edification of the saints, not the frustration of the saints, should be our goal in ministry. We should want to build up the saints and not tear down their convictions in certain non-essential areas (Rom.14:1-5). Since there may be those serving within the assembly who may be discouraged or offended by a more expressive style of worship, and since we as God's children are to be understanding and not offensive to God's saints in trivial matters (I Cor. 8:10-13), we should seek at times to *cater to the convictions* of others in worship, so we can minister to people without offence.

Let us remember that we are ministering to people in church services. Ministry is all about loving, exhorting, and building up the saints. If we forget this we should run as fast as we can to get out of ministry!

1 Thessalonians 5:11 says:

“Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.”

When we cause doubt and create friction in a more reserved church, through different styles or expressions in worship, then the saints will not

be built up in that particular ministry and all will be to no avail. Our aim and focus in ministry should be to create a peaceful and unified atmosphere among the saints and build them up.

Romans 14:19 reminds of this important truth.

“Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.”

As we “follow after the things which make for peace” and “keep the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3) in our gathered meetings of corporate worship, we will have wonderful fellowship among the brethren.

“Heart with heart in love united,  
Seek upon God’s heart repose.  
Let your love, to flames ignited,  
To the Saviour upward flow.  
He the Head and we His members;  
He the light and we the glow;  
He the Master, we His brethren,  
In true fellowship we grow.”

## **5. Lawful Worship**

There are certain expressions in worship that may be lawful and acceptable even within the realm of what is deemed righteous (2 Cor. 6:14). However, just because something is lawful does not always make it expedient or suitable to do at all times and in all places. There are times we must limit our worship.

1 Corinthians 10:23

“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.”

We need to remember this with some of our outward expressions of worship in certain congregations. Although there is no direct law against lifting a hand, or using hand gestures while singing a song, there is sometimes a need to limit this practice, so we might minister to God’s saints without offence. Although there is nothing in Scripture that says we cannot clap our hands in our time of worship, we might reconsider the practice if a congregation is not accustomed to using this particular

expression of worship. We want to leave a meeting knowing that we have built up God's people in the truth, instead of discouraging them with some trivial act or expression of worship, which might offend them.

Here is another example. It may be lawful for me, as a pastor, to not wear a tie to church, but I choose to wear a tie in my time of worship, so I do not bring offence to those who believe wearing a tie is part of a pastor's attire. The practice of not wearing a tie is lawful but it's not necessarily expedient or suitable in some cases. The same may be true regarding the issue of women wearing slacks. There is a difference of opinion regarding this matter even among fundamentalists who embrace the same separatist principles. Fundamentalists continue to agree to disagree over this issue. However, the difference should not divide them, and the more reserved churches still take the approach that women should refrain from wearing slacks during church services and times of ministry.

Romans 14:15

"But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died."

To put it in laymen's terms, don't allow the trivial things in worship to become a bone of contention among the saints in those separatist churches that seem to be more reserved in their style of worship. Remember, as fellow fundamentalists, we are not out to grieve the saints, but to minister to them and walk among them in love, by limiting certain expressions of outward worship that might be offensive.

So let us learn and be teachable in this area. We should be willing to limit our liberty at times for the sake of ministry among the saints. Yes, there is a small difference of opinion regarding some outward forms of expressive worship, even among fundamental churches, forms of worship which may be within the parameters of righteous and holy worship. However, we should never seek to cause strife or division in a ministry (Eph. 4:3) by insisting on having our worship styles and those particular expressions of worship that might bring offence to others. Instead, we should count it a privilege to be used in any fundamental, Bible-believing, separated church and limit our liberties where and when necessary.

This approach to ministry is not legalism on our part. It is rather a sensitive and serving attitude toward one another who will always feel differently about certain trivial areas related to worship and outreach.

Romans 14:16

“Let not then your good be evil spoken of.”

We need to remember this truth and apply it to our ministry and service within the local, fundamental circles and churches with which we fellowship. We certainly do not want our ministry to receive a bad name based upon an expression of liberty that was misunderstood by some of the brethren.

William MacDonald said: “So the principle here is that we should not allow these secondary things, which are perfectly permissible in themselves, to give occasion to others to condemn us for our looseness or lovelessness.”

Let us remember that failing to practice some trivial expression in worship does not change our spiritual relationship with God (1 Cor. 8:8). Therefore, we should be willing to limit our liberty and not allow our liberty to be “evil spoken of” among the fundamental brethren because of their misunderstanding or misinterpreting of a particular expression of liberty.

“Blest be the tie, that binds  
Our hearts in Christian love;  
The fellowship of kindred minds  
Is like to that above.”

## **6. Unified Worship**

United we stand, divided we fall! It’s still true.

Psalms 133:1

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”

Paul exhorted the Philippians to always consider others before themselves (1 Peter 5:5-6). This principle will go a long way in keeping disharmony from entering our fundamental church ministries. When we consider the convictions of others in minor areas of worship, and are willing to cater to those convictions in our corporate gathering, then we will maintain the unity

of the saints.

1 Peter 3:8 declares:

“Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous.”

As fundamentalists, we should seek to be unified (“one mind”) in our gatherings of corporate worship, even when we sometimes must limit our liberty, so that all of God’s saints are encouraged and their hearts are drawn toward the Lord (Heb. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18).

“Where unity is found,  
The sweet anointing grace  
Extends to all around,  
And consecrates the place;  
To every waiting soul it comes,  
And fills it with divine perfumes.”

Sometimes a simple and small adjustment in our area of corporate worship and decorum can result in a great blessing among the saints and have a lasting effect in the hearts and lives of God’s people. Remember, ministry is not about you; it’s about others, so minister to God’s saints and don’t offend them.

Ephesians 4:3 says:

“Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

As we serve in the local fundamental church ministry we should always strive to maintain unity and peace. Our efforts to do this are sparked by the work of the Holy Spirit. In short, when peace results from unity, we know that the Holy Spirit is at work. Of course, a common reaction among fundamentalists, when small differences arise, is to divide and start another party. But this is never the correct response.

There always must be love, understanding, and a spirit of submissiveness in our ministry (“Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God” – Eph. 5:21). *Remember, separation is not the answer to every disagreement among the brethren.* Sometimes we need to limit our liberty and respond in love to the brethren. Sometimes we need to simply eat our humble pie and go on serving without allowing trivial differences to divide us in our worship

and outreach. One way we do this is to limit some of our expressions of worship, which might bring offence to some saints, and strive to maintain peace among the brethren in this way.

Philippians 2:4 says:

“Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.”

You must ask yourself these questions. Is your only aim to come to church and worship God without considering the convictions of others? Do you want others to worship God without being disrupted or discouraged by some outward expression of worship that may seem questionable to them? We must remember that we are not the only worshippers in the sanctuary. Is expressing a certain form or style of worship more important to you than seeing the saint’s hearts and lives touched and ministered to?

Are you willing to limit your liberty in certain areas of outward expressive worship, such as lifting the hands, or using hand gestures during times of singing, shouting out repetitive and excessively loud amen’s, or if necessary, presenting music in a southern style? Are you willing to limit yourself and make some adjustments in your ministry, so you can maintain an accepted practice of decorum in a specific church setting, worship in a fundamental assembly, and minister to those saints and ministries, who are more reserved, and who might take offence? What is more important to you? We should never want to miss the opportunity to minister to God’s saints, or be involved in fundamental church ministry, because of our own desire to advance our liberty. This is not a serving attitude toward people. We should want to be a servant to others.

1 Peter 2:16

“As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.”

The truth is this. There are churches today who do take a more reserved or less expressive approach to ministry or worship. They steer away from theatrics in their primary church services. They don’t raise their hands in their times of singing or worship, nor do they adopt the more country and laid back approach to singing and worship. Once again, there are some churches that believe the less expressive and more reserved approach to ministry is the *safer* approach to ministry and what represents separated,

sanctified, and reverent worship in the best possible light, in the midst of the charismatic chaos and entertainment that is running rampant in the churches.

Benjamin Franklin said:

“We must all hang together, or we shall all hang separately.”

As fellow fundamentalists we need to continue to have a serving and loving heart toward one another and desire to be unified in the main things that Fundamentalism has always rallied around – separation from apostasy and worldliness. After all, the main things are the plain things, and the plain things are the main things. What else needs to be said? “Let brotherly love continue” (Heb. 13:1).

“Let us love our God supremely,  
Let us love each other, too;  
Let us love and pray for sinners,  
Till our God makes all things new,  
Then He’ll call us home to heaven,  
At His table, we’ll sit down;  
Christ will gird himself, and serve us  
With sweet manna all around.”