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THE BAPTIST HERITAGE

OCTOBER 20, 2005

But Miriam Danced!

THE ROLE OF MUSIC
THE LOWEST COMMON DENOMINATOR IN APOSTASY

The answer to the first response of the anticipated challenge of those readers who already know from the sub-title that they will find disagreement with this article is "You are correct. I am not a professional musician. I have no academic background in music theory. I admit that I have no expertise in music." That is my answer, but this is my response to that same inane question: "The issue under discussion is not 'the science or art of ordering tones or sounds in succession, in combination, and in temporal relationships to produce a composition having unity and continuity.' Nor is the subject of my comments those 'vocal, instrumental, or mechanical sounds having rhythm, melody, or harmony.' The topic is neither the physical activity of producing and/or of discerning sounds nor the intellectual endeavor of devising and/or of interpreting a specific arrangement in a predetermined sequence of those sounds. The issue in this article is the role of music and not music. The word "role" is used in this article with the precise meaning of "the function or part performed especially in a particular operation or process." Thus, I am discussing the function or part performed by music in the particular operation or process of worshipping the God of Heaven. I am not discussing "tastes," and/or "preferences," commonly described as "styles" and how you and I may have predilections or predispositions for music that differs.

I have no desire to devote time or energy to strife "about words." "Endless genealogies" are more worthy of consideration than continual debate about the merits of various "styles" of music. [I use the term "style" to describe a distinctive manner of expression or a particular technique by which music is done, created, or performed.] When one reads or hears the perverse contention that "God may be worshipped with all styles of music," one may confidently assert that

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this and that

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1962 was a great time to begin the journey as a pastor. It did not seem that way in 1962, but it was. The societal revolution was beginning; the nation thought she was living in Camelot, little realizing that her tent was pitched toward Sodom. The Soviet Empire was expanding on every continent; Viet Nam was an ally in need under the SEATO Treaty—a bond, Kennedy said was as binding as NATO. Baptists still read *The Trail of Blood*, met on Sunday evening for *hell-fire and brimstone evangelistic services* [in spite of *The Ed Sullivan Show's* explicit infringement] and on Wednesday for *The Hour of Power*, held two-week revivals in the spring and the fall, expected the rapture, and knew that the LORD Jesus would be ruling soon—because “things could not get any worse.” Dr. Billy Graham was blurring the lines of cooperation, but the

distinction between the liberal and the Bible believer was recognized. “He was just using *them* [the liberals] to get a wider opportunity.” The Beatles, Elvis, and the “rock-and-roll” world were separate from the Christian world. Billy’s philosophy of “wider opportunity” at the price of doctrinal purity prevailed; Ed won the competition. 2006 will arrive with most *baptist churches* having “*them*” on the platform and looking like the *Ed Sullivan Show on Sunday morning*. The hippies were right, “the times, they [were] a-changing.”

—Pastor Manley

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supremacy of God—having challenged the sole basis of salvation as the grace of God—he boldly asserts that man has the right to determine what is right and what is wrong—to know what is good and to know what is evil. In the language of 2005, this would be couched something like this—*“If I think it is good, then it is good. It may be evil in your eyes, but you have no right to impose your belief system on me. You can believe whatever you wish as long as what you believe does not condemn me.”*

Satan is content to have any person worship anything as long as that person does not worship the Creator, the great God of Heaven. You can worship a rock, a star, or a Rock star—Satan does not care. You can worship another fallen angel or Satan himself—Satan does not care. You can worship yourself or another person—Satan does not care. You can worship any god that you can conceive—Satan does not care. If, however, you worship the God of the Bible, you will find yourself hated by Satan and mocked by the world.

How does this fit with my subject? When one sets aside the purpose that God establishes for music and substitutes any of the choices of humanity for the use of music, he or she has opened the doorway to apostasy. This is true whether the change is made in the home or on the platform of a Baptist church. When music is used for personal or corporate entertainment or is used solely to attract or to retain attendance and is, in either process, incorporated into the worship of the God of Heaven, then the gateway to apostasy has been entered. Just inside that gate, the pathway becomes a very slippery slope. Descending is easy, almost effortless; climbing out of that abysmal abyss is difficult, almost impossible. The best advice is to stay as far from the entryway as possible. Music is the most enticing passageway to apostasy. The evidence is openly displayed for all who will care enough to pause long enough in their pursuit of happiness to examine it. The journey for Brittany Spears from the innocence of the church chorister to the brazen bawdiness of the chorus line was just the passage of her teen years; Elvis took a little longer and even tried, at times simultaneously, to cling to the religious and irreligious. He also kept his clothes on in public. Elvis is gone; prayers for him are now meaningless. Brittany still lives; we should pray for her to repent or to be saved [God alone knows which she needs] as much and as fervently as we condemn the music of her (and his) apostasy. Elvis and Brittany should be sufficient warnings to prevent anyone from even wandering near the gateway. Wisdom cries, “Take heed and turn away.”

“But Miriam danced.” So she did; but Brittany is not a Miriam.

—Dr. Manley

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things ye do. 9 And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. 10 For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: 11 But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, *It is Corban*, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; *he shall be free.* 12 And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; 13 Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.

Notice again:

Verse 7—Worship in vain

Verse 7—teaching the doctrine of men

Verse 8—laying aside the commandment of God

Verse 8—hold the tradition of men

Verse 9—reject the commandment of God

Verse 13—making the word of God of none effect

These men had substituted their tradition, their thoughts, and their desires in the place of the word of God. They determined to overrule God. These particular men kept the terminology of the true worship of God but changed the meanings. Adam laid aside the commandment of God by rejecting it and proceeded as though the word of God had no effect by substituting his own will—in doing so, he made the word of God of none effect. In simple terms, he declared the word of God to be set aside or superseded. He replaced the word of God with his own words. This was the goal of Satan—for Adam to establish his own religion, to worship another—even if it were Adam—in the place of the God of Heaven. Some believe that Satan intended for Adam to worship him—that might be, but Satan's statement of encouragement was that "Ye shall be as gods." I have no doubt that Satan is pleased to have human beings worship him—whether directly or indirectly. However, the tantalizing temptation that he dangled before Eve and thus to Adam is that they could come to possess the ability to determine for themselves what is right and what is wrong. That would make them "gods."

[Genesis 3] 4 And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: 5 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. 6 And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise,

Satan promotes the doctrine that man is the final authority of all matters—matters of religion and matters of life. Having established that the whole purpose of living is to enjoy self-satisfaction—having denied the

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those words rise from a paganized heart, addicted to a certain style of music. Such disputations are but prating foolishness that weary intelligent folks. No one of sound mind [no pun intended] challenges the ipso facto premise that certain styles of music are erotic, lascivious, and/or carnal both in composition and by performance. As but one indisputable, incontrovertible example, the music flavor associated with the *establishments* along Bourbon Street is not the music that emanates from or accompanies marching saints. Particular music is wicked because of its words. Other music is immoral because of its rhythm. Those ungodly adaptations of music are not redeemable by cosmetically sanitizing the words or through superficially changing the tempo. To defend the differences between appropriate and such inappropriate "styles" of music with the premise that these disparities are merely the expressions of personal preferences is complete foolishness—and, *it is a waste of time.* I am convinced that I will never persuade a lover of wicked words and immoral rhythms that his or her choice of music is wrong by the use of logic or reasoning. That individual is blinded by that love, and, as the old joke went, "her love is not only blind, it is deaf and dumb."

After a conversation concerning the music of the world being used in worship, a young woman responded, "But, Miriam danced." From the triumphant tone of her delivery, it was certain that she believed that she had destroyed my argument beyond rebuttal. *Though Scripture actually says that the women who followed Miriam danced*, I had to admit, as the young woman knew that I would, that it was very likely that Miriam had danced. Not only that, but also those women and Miriam sang and they carried timbrels. It is amazing how the carnal minds of individuals can remember Scripture that appears [note that word] to justify their quest of questionable conduct. Practically every drunk and social "imbiber" that I ever encountered was certain that Paul said that it was "okay to drink a little wine." Several misers have reminded me that "tithing is Old Testament law and not required under grace" and I never met a hypocrite who did not believe [wrongly, of course] that "Judge not, lest ye be judged" is a Bible verse.

Actually, Miriam is not the only Bible character recorded as having danced. So did the daughter of Herodias [not identified by Scripture, but named by historians and commentaries as Salome]. My challenger failed to make the connection, but she had effectively, though unwittingly, proven my position better than I had. No intelligent person would confuse the dances of Miriam and of Salome believing that the same *styles* of music accompanied Miriam and Salome [or that they dressed alike or moved with the same demeanor or with the same motivation]. Undeniably, some music is inappropriate for worship by its very design. As for the

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actual dances, I could not imagine that anyone would confuse the Hebraic religious dancing with ballroom dancing, square dancing, "whatever style you wish to inject," or the ballet. The dancing of Miriam and the dancing of Salome were literally "worlds apart" and have nothing in common in construction or performance.

While specific styles of music are clearly unworthy of use in worship, I am not a devotee to the exclusive sanction of one particular style of music. My mother raised me to listen to the "Grand Old Opry" on Saturday evening and "The Metropolitan Grand Opera" on Sunday afternoon. I would have no problem with Handel and Stamps-Baxter in the same service. With equal sincerity, I affirm that the alleged sacred clones of Bourbon Street are not welcomed in any service. The issue is not merely "personal preference"—some music is simply not fit to bring from the swine lot to the church house. I can guarantee that the prodigal left his music in the far country when he "came to himself" and returned to his father's house. Equally so, the music of riotous living is not suitable for the house of the holy God of Heaven. Therefore, I say again, that this article does not address music—that issue is easily settled in a paragraph—the article addresses the "role of music."

I found it most interesting [and enlightening] that Merriam-Webster provides the following synonyms for the word "music": din, babel, clamor, hubbub, hullabaloo, jangle, pandemonium, racket, tumult, [and] uproar. I would not have believed it had I not read it; having read it, I am more than ever convinced that Merriam-Webster is the authority for words.

Now, shall we consider the role of music in apostasy? Our discussion begins in an unlikely place; however, I believe starting there will be worthwhile. We begin with a question, "Shall we gather at the river?" which, of course, is the title of a universally recognized Christian song. The tune is not memorable—but every one of my readers likely has it flowing through the mind even now.

The song, *Shall We Gather At The River*, is one of over 500 composed by Pastor Robert Lowery, written in 1864, and first published in *Happy Voices*, 1865, as number 220. This was the first of at least 15 hymnals that he edited or co-edited. Robert Lowery was, in 1864, in his third of five Baptist pastorates and New York City was in the final days of an epidemic. Pastor Lowery described the way the theme came to his mind. Under the weight of the Civil War and the multiple deaths in the city and among his congregation from the plague, he testified that "one afternoon in July 1864, when I was pastor at Hanson Place Baptist Church, Brooklyn, the weather was oppressively hot, and I was lying on a lounge in a state of physical exhaustion ... My imagination began to take itself wings. Visions of the future passed before me with startling vividness. The imagery of the apocalypse took the form of a tableau. Brightest

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[1 Timothy 6] 6 But godliness with contentment is great gain.

Fifteen times the word "godliness" is used in the New Testament and each time, it has the meaning of having a life that reflects the character of following God in conduct, attitude, and manner. It is living as God would have us live; that is, in submission to God and with reverence for God. Obedience to the revealed will of God is godliness. Disobedience is ungodliness. "Godliness with contentment is great gain." It is not godliness, with contentment, that is great gain—as though two things are mentioned: godliness *and* contentment, and that these two things together are the great gain. Godliness with contentment [being content with godliness] is presented and defined as being the great gain.

Adam was not content with godliness and sacrificed everything in his disobedience. Created to walk with the LORD God in fellowship—he gave that away. Created to enjoy the whole world, except for a single tree—one tree out of the entire world and he forfeited all of the trees for a single meal from that forbidden tree. Created to have dominion over the whole of the earth, he traded dominion for scratching out a living by the sweat of his face. Created to live forever, he purchased death. *He had godliness, but he was not content.* From the nature that we inherit from Adam—human nature, called in the Scriptures "the flesh," "the old man," "the old nature"—comes all the works of the flesh and all the wretchedness that rises from the heart. Satan merely fans the smoldering embers to bring them bursting into roaring flames.

Return with me to our passage in Mark 7, because the LORD Jesus touches something there besides this terrible propensity of the human heart for sin.

1 Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. 2 And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. 3 For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash *their* hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. 4 And *when they come* from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brassen vessels, and of tables. 5 Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? 6 He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. 7 Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. 8 For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like

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It is not necessary for Satan to force humanity to degradation and debauchery. Humanity left to its self will find all the wretched vileness of wickedness without needing even a gentle nudge. Sodom and Gomorrah was the product of the unchecked sin nature of humanity—not a special dispensation of Satan's work. Yet, Satan is busy and so are the devils—I believe that their chief occupation is to encourage religions—any religion and every religion *except Biblical Christianity*. Satan promotes religion; he encourages worship. Not pure religion and undefiled and not worship in spirit and in truth—but a form of religion and of worship nonetheless. I cannot emphasize enough that Satan is a liar—there is no truth in him—that is the description that the LORD Jesus Christ gives. Whatever he teaches is a counterfeit—it is a lie that sounds, *but only sounds*, as if it were truth.

Satan is a teacher of doctrine. His first doctrine is that self-exaltation is a virtue—presented in at least four tenets,

1. Self-gratification is the highest fulfillment of life. "Ye shall not surely die."
2. Self-expression is the noblest achievement in life. "In the day ye eat thereof, then"
3. Self-experience is the surest knowledge in life. "Your eyes shall be opened."
4. Self-worship is the final reality. "Ye shall be as gods."

The second doctrine that the Satan and his devils teach is the doctrine of denial—or of casting doubt on the character of God and upon the nature of salvation. "And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:"

[Jude] For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

[2 Peter 2] But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

It is the purpose of Satan to make us to distrust the character of God and to be discontent with the treatment that we receive from God. He does this by deception—he turns our eyes from what God gives us and causes us to focus upon what God denies us. Adam and Eve had wondrous permissions and only a single prohibition in the garden—yet Satan was able to make that one forbidden tree among all the trees of the Garden to appear to be the only thing in the Garden worth having; and Adam disobeyed God to obtain what God had denied him and his wife.

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of all were the throne, the heavenly river, and the gathering of the saints ... I began to wonder why the hymn writers had said so much about the 'river of death' and so little about the 'pure water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and the Lamb.' As I mused, the words began to construct themselves. They came first as a question of Christian inquiry, 'Shall we gather?' Then they broke in chorus, 'Yes, we'll gather.' On this question and answer, the hymn developed itself. The music came with the hymn."

Please take note that in the following printing of the words for the song, alternate words are given in brackets []. Not all hymnals have the same sequence or wording for the verses and I am not yet positive that I have found the order in which they originally were placed. This is the most logical reconstruction to me. The title of the poetry, though sometimes ascribed as *The Beautiful River*, is found more often, using the question from the first line, as the familiar "Shall We Gather At The River."

Since his work was not inspired, I am certain that Bro. Lowery will not be irreconcilably offended if a word has been changed or if a verse has been misplaced by the musical scribes in the transmission of the text or notes. After all, the 1865 edition was not really an authorized version.

The title in the *Innovative Living Standard Amplified Multicultural Pleaseall Hymnal*, 2005½ CCM Edition, is GIV·a·ME·FIVE AT THE GETTING DOWN Ta-GATHER, with the following synopsis:

An exciting allegorical affirmation that it might perhaps be possible that in some future form, present earthly beings will congregate at an alleged water source in propinquity to the transactional pathway of celestial essences transitioning along a poetically depicted transparent-colorless-quartz-resembling ethereal substance that ebbs and flows in the proximity of the alleged governmental residency of the Supreme Being(s).

EDITOR'S NOTE: Since some readers have demonstrated a gift at mistaking parody for theology, I hasten to state that no such hymnal exists and that I constructed the entire previous paragraph out of thin air in an attempt at unveiled sarcasm. The above bordered comments were also intentionally satirical.

1. Shall we gather at the river, Where bright angels feet have trod, With its crystal tide forever Flowing by the throne of God?
2. On the bosom of the river, Where the Savior-King we own, We shall meet and sorrow never, 'Neath the glory of the throne.
3. Ere we reach the shining river, Lay we ev'ry burden down; Grace our spirits will deliver And provide a robe and crown.

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4. On the margin of the river, Washing up its silver spray, We will walk [talk] and worship ever, All the happy golden day.
5. At the smiling of the river, Mirror of [Rippling with] the Savior's face, Saints, whom death will never sever, Lift their songs of saving grace.
6. Soon we'll reach the silver [shining] river, Soon our pilgrimage will cease; Soon our happy hearts will quiver With the melody of peace.

Chorus:

Yes, we'll gather at the river, The beautiful, the beautiful river,
Gather with the saints at the river, That flows by the throne of God.

A careful reading will show that the words of the song are indeed doctrinal in nature and are reflective of a very practical form of Christianity. The writer took for granted that those who sang his song would have more than a superficial knowledge of the Book of the Revelation, which he obviously accepted as literal and not figurative or "entirely symbolic." He properly describes the river as a silver, shining, beautiful, crystal river flowing by the Throne of God. He places God forever on the Throne of Heaven. He gave angels feet and neither wings or long hair. He describes the Savior as King and declares that those in Heaven will own Him as their King. He affirms that there will be no burdens or sorrow in Heaven. Saints are delivered by grace and grace provides both the robe and the crown. The believer is on an ever-shortening pilgrimage that will terminate in Heaven where the melody of peace will forever thrill the heart. The chorus declares the confidence of assurance. While Lowery does use poetic license with words, he takes no liberty with the truth. There is no exaggeration or embellishment of Scripture. While the song describes the experience of the believer in Heaven, the believer is not exalted; the God of Heaven is glorified.

The theology that Lowery conveys is so profound that a preacher could devote a sermon series to the song and have material left over to develop into a second. The theology is so simple that a child can grasp the fullness of the truth contained. The song has a message for the scholar and yet speaks to the man barely able to read. While it might not be on anyone's list of "my top ten favorites," it would certainly be on everybody's list of the ten best-known first, third, and last verses and choruses. However, verses 2, 4 and 5 would scarcely be recognized if found by themselves. My mind is assuredly "*un-infallible*," but I cannot recall the song ever being requested during a favorites' Sunday night singing in the last fifty years. I also cannot remember the song being used as a solo. I am certain that some composer has made a choral arrangement for the song,

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gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. 12 And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; 13 Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye. 14 And when he had called all the people unto him, he said unto them, Harken unto me every one of you, and understand: 15 There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man. 16 If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. 17 And when he was entered into the house from the people, his disciples asked him concerning the parable. 18 And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him; 19 Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats? 20 And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. 21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, 22 Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness; 23 All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

I am not suggesting that Satan does not encourage humanity to sin—both individually and collectively. He certainly does. We find in Scripture that he prompted David to number the people in violation of the command of God—Satan fertilized, as it were, the pride lying in David's heart until it burst forth with its vile bloom. Satan tried to entice Job to sin against God by bringing misery, tragedy, and disease to the life and the person of Job. Satan entered into Judas, stroked the fires of covetousness, resentment, and bitterness, leading him to betray the LORD Jesus Christ. Satan promoted envy and pride in the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira until he filled them so full that they lied to the Holy Spirit. Satan has an interest in our sinning; that cannot be denied. However, on the other hand, David needed none of Satan's fertilizer on his lust to prompt him to commit adultery or on his guilty heart to cause him to murder. He was quite capable of all that for himself—because of his heart.

[Mark 7] 21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, 22 Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness; 23 All these evil things come from within,

[Galatians 5] 19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, 20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, 21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like:

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nipulated to suit individual tastes.

The second issue is to notice that both passages require that the Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs be sung "to the Lord" whether they are sung in the heart or to one another. In general, terms, that which is sung is to be prayer and/or praise. While we Christians exclusively use the title "The Psalms" for the Book, deriving the title from the Greek word meaning "a poem to be sung to a stringed instrument," Hebrew writers often refer to the Psalms as both praises ["Tehillim"] and prayers ["Tephiloth"]. The Psalms were not addressed to men, but to God.

The third issue is to observe that the passage directly connects music to "the Spirit" and "the word of Christ."

As regards God, my music is to praise God or to pray to God.

As regards my fellow believers as they listen to my song, my music is to teach and to admonish them. Music in worship is not for the purpose of entertainment. Music in worship is not a means to an end.

That Old Serpent, the Father of Lies, called the Devil and Satan is a counterfeiter by trade. In particular, he is a promoter of religions. We have a tendency to see the degradation and the debauchery of this world and label that as the work of Satan. However, that is not at all accurate, and, is actually exactly the opposite of the purpose of Satan. The LORD Jesus Christ makes this very clear.

[Mark 7] 1 Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. 2 And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. 3 For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash *their* hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. 4 And *when they come* from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables. 5 Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands? 6 He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with *their* lips, but their heart is far from me. 7 Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. 8 For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. 9 And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. 10 For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: 11 But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, *It is Corban*, that is to say, a

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but a quick check did not locate any.

Then, of course, Pastor Lowery asks a very serious question in his song. It is asked as an encouragement to believers to endure the sorrows and burdens of the pilgrimage because one of these days, we are "gonna lay our burdens down." Yet, in his encouragement of believers, he is also asking a question that serves to call sinners to Christ. The song is a declaration that the grace of God is available for those who will receive it and that any listener could also know that he/she will gather with the saints at the river as it flows past the throne of God.

However, my comments are on the role of music in apostasy and this song is a fitting introduction as that particular song has an interesting connection to the entertainment media and is therefore pertinent to our discussion. Whenever the writers in ancient Hollywood (circa 1930-1950 or early television circa 1950s-1960s) desired to introduce into their storyline a preaching event or a church service, particularly in a cowboy-and-Indian shoot-'em-up western, they seemed always to find it convenient to introduce the familiar Gospel song of Robert Lowery, who never received a penny in royalties for its repeated use. Often the setting of the song would be symbolically situated near a rock-strewn, rapid-filled river, which had a large area of pooled water. Because of my misbegotten youth and continuing carnal nature, when I hear the song, I generally think of Ward Bond and hear his wagon-master, parson, or farmer voice (according to his assigned role) singing in my memory. I am certain that the directors or writers selected the song for more than one reason. It was, indeed, a favorite song during the depression era and nearly every American viewing such a scene in those and the following years knew the song; and that familiarity, no doubt, contributed to its popularity with the writers. Many of them likely had heard their own mothers sing the song before they drifted away from her teachings. Strange as it sounds to post-modern ears, this was once a church-going land—even in the "big cities." It was almost a God-fearing country. One might say that this land was then a country where the majority was not yet willing to assume openly that there is no "God of the Bible" sitting on the Throne in Heaven. Arrogantly, the majority today is not only willing to do so, but to do so quite vocally. Today, the swaggering assurance is asserted by science, educators, and theologians that "if by chance, some god does exist, that god is not the God of the Bible." The fifty-plus years of the increasingly pervasive invasive rulership of the Department of Education amalgamating all educable minds to think in lockstep and the long decades of the anti-godly rampages of the misnamed American Civil Liberties Union, which might more aptly be described along the lines of *American Corruption Legally Undertaken*, have affected vivid effects on our daily lives. To paraphrase

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the old song, *The Old Gray Mare*, "America, She Ain't What She Used To Be." She surely isn't.

Even though "*Shall We Gather At The River*" was widely known and could be identified by most of the audience, there were other reasons for selecting these particular words and this melody. I think the song also was chosen by the entertainment industry to inflict a subtle ridicule upon the "Bible-thumpers" and the "pie in the sky" mentality that the self-absorbed, intellectually irreligious elite have always fancied existed among those who profess faith in the deity of Jesus of Nazareth. "*Shall We Gather At The River*" was used as a crafty tool to ridicule Christians and not to acknowledge any validity to the message of the crucified and risen Saviour. I noted an internet source touting the popularity of the song that reported that "*Shall We Gather At The River*" was sung in a 1985 Academy Award winning film. If so, it was no more of a spiritual gesture than when director John Ford claimed it as his favorite hymn—at least not a godly spiritual gesture. In today's television and Hollywood, that former element of subtle ridicule has given way to blatant mockery. These media now proudly present Biblical Christian morality, Biblical Christian ethics, and Biblical Christian teachings as being perversions of humanity's natural inclinations. Some are so bold as to declare that the cause of immorality and criminal activity is religious faith, particularly Christianity. Do not mistake the dangers on our battlefield—the world is not neutral; the entertainment voices are anti-Christian and anti-Bible. "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God"—or at least that is what the Holy Ghost moved James to record (4:4).

In fact, the predominant 2005 America philosophy of life is anti-Christian and Christians need to recognize that fact and prepare for worse that is yet to come. The stigma attached to Biblical Christianity in 2005 is a direct outflow of the political correctness [Merriam-Webster identifies this as a term entering American language in 1936.] and the multiculturalism [1941] that became the keynote of the 1992 presidential campaign. The outcome of that particular election has been described by political and informational voices as a victory for moral relativity, alternative lifestyles, and the internationalization of the United States. At least two Supreme Court justices now cite the laws and constitutions of other nations as a proper basis for deciding constitutional questions *within the United States*. While I would not wish to describe previous, following, or future elections as godly exercises or Christian enterprises, I must acknowledge that the 1992 date is significant. The timing of the "in-your-face" change in public morality can indeed be traced to the early 1990s. While they did not commence then, the openness and the vicious

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continue to contend for the faith when she ceases to preach the word in season and out of season. No church can contend for the faith when the church is looking for a season of entertainment in an entertainment center.

The role of music in apostasy is one that has a historical record and a contemporary involvement. Music becomes an apostatizing religious agency when music is perverted from its intended purpose. The Bible speaks with perfect clarity on the issue of the purpose of music in worship. The old preachers used the word "perspicuity," meaning "plain to the understanding especially because of clarity and precision of presentation" to describe the Bible. Certainly, the Biblical concept of the relationship of worship and music is perspicuous. No sincere reader can leave the Scriptures confused on this matter.

Ephesians 5 [If you follow the punctuation, you will understand that these verses form one sentence.]

18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; 19 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; 20 Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; 21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

These are the two classic passages in the New Testament on singing or the use of music in the worship of the LORD. The first issue before us is to define the terms for the three types of music that are identified: Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

1. The word "psalms" refers to those Hebrew poems of praise or of prayer that are found in the Book of the Psalms that were written to be sung with musical instruments.
2. The word "hymns" refers to those Hebrew poems that are found in the Book of the Psalms containing only matters of praise.
3. The phrase "spiritual songs" refers to those Hebrew poems of praise or of prayer that are found in the Book of the Psalms that are doctrinal, prophetic, or historical in nature.

It is not reliable, proper exegesis to define these three terms as "Scripture (Psalms), songs that glorify God and have no chorus (hymns), and Gospel songs and choruses (spiritual songs)—instead, that is 21st Century eisegesis and an anachronism of some 1600 to 1800 years! In simple terms, it is wrong to do so. Words have defined meanings and should not be ma-

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is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.”] At every opportunity, the apostle repudiated the concept of human gimmickry being substituted for the preaching of the Gospel. While I have no doubt that films, live drama, and various other media have resulted in the salvation of souls, I believe that the substitution of any or all human alternatives for preaching is wrong. It is wrong because it violates Scripture.

I believe that Ken Andersen and others were sincere as they introduced the churches of fifty years ago to “Christian films.” I also am convinced that those pioneers of what has mutated into Christian entertainment never envisioned that their works would replace preaching. The problem is that human conceptions introduced to supplement the program of God always usurp the “spotlight.” It is known *in the business* as “stealing the show.” Christian entertainment, of whatever nature, always begins its life as a means to supplement the preaching; eventually, it will replace the preaching. The inherent problem is that the entertainment is far more appealing to the natural nature of humanity than preaching is and entertainment soon becomes the only means to keep the attendance. “Meet their needs” [by which is meant, “fulfill their desires”] becomes the guiding light when the church begins to remold herself as the world turns the spindle—particularly when the church is only concerned with reaching the young and the restless. Soon, very soon, Saturday night live becomes Sunday morning at eleven.

The apostle instructed Timothy to “preach the word.” Paul wrote nothing about entertaining the attendees. Timothy was challenged when he had done all, “to stand”; but he was assuredly not expected to become a stand-up comic. No one can contend for spiritual truth and entertain the old nature at the same time. “A little bit of sugar may make the medicine go down,” but that is fatal advice for the diabetic. To assume that the dilution of Gospel to sweeten the bitter taste will retain its efficacy and, yet, make it palatable to the world is soulcide. I know that the dictionary does not yet have that word, but it should. It is the proper word to describe the action of commingling worldliness and godliness in the pulpit and mutating the pulpit into a stage. No believer will maintain a Scripturally based spiritual life then that believer is engaged in the pursuit of happiness, lusting for diversion and amusement. No preacher is contending for the faith when he is engaged in the entertainment of the lost in an attempt to gain their cooperation with God in the implementation of His plan for their lives. The concept is pagan, not Biblical.

No church will remain anchored to the faith when she ceases to contend for the faith, because she will become ignorant of the faith and someone will cut the anchor line, and the church will drift without even realizing it. This has happened repeatedly across America. No church will

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ness of anti-Christian and anti-Biblical attacks show a marked increase dating from that precise era.

However, the only actual change is that the hostility of the anti-Christianity of educational, entertainment, and political America did indeed come out of those assorted closets. What had always been couched in innuendo and hidden in veiled allusion is now paraded with unmistakable clarity. I think that one reason for the apparent change is that the old producers and distributors retained a fearfulness of overtly offending Christians and that the new producers and distributors elatedly receive delight in explicitly offending Christians. I do not mean to suggest that Old America was a friend to grace, and it is patently obvious that Contemporary America does not help anyone on to God. It is unpleasant to write, but it is true that Americanized Christianity itself is rapidly becoming no friend to grace, but has subtly turned grace into license for lasciviousness.

An individual made this observation recently: the more ungodly the lifestyle of the entertainer, the larger *is the cross that is displayed around the neck*. One could add that the clothing being worn belies the wearing of the cross. Terry Mattingly, a secular writer, called attention to the hypocrisy [Mixed Messages: Spears’ Naughty Image Belies Her Christian Belief, San Jose Mercury News, September 2, 2000] citing the fact that in spite of the fact that Brittany Spears landed a recording contract by singing “Jesus Loves Me” and claims to be a “born again Bible belt Baptist.” *This preacher almost chokes on writing those words; I do not know her—it is doubtful that I would recognize her if I were to meet her. She may well be a church member; but she is not a “born again Bible belt Baptist” with a godly testimony according to the published reports of her life. Walk through any supermarket checkout line and you will have all the evidence that you need to verify my assessment.* Mattingly described her [in 2000] as “a confusing postmodern mix of spirituality and teasing schoolgirl sexuality.” *Her conduct since 2000 has removed the “teasing.”* Dan Kimball [The Emerging Church, page 53], no longer a fundamentalist by his own admission, quotes Mattingly and then continues, “We also see this troubling combination displayed in artists like Destiny’s Child or Jessica Simpson, young women who are vocal about their Christian beliefs but send hypersexual messages through their appearance and lyrics.” [Note to Dan Kimball—it is not “troubling.” Troubling is when a Christian gets a speeding ticket. Try the word despicable, hypocritical, ungodly, or satanic.]

How have we arrived at such a place? I find it no incidental issue that the pathway to music fame for a seemingly majority of “stars” has led directly from church choirs to the Hollywood Star label. Music has been the common denominator for the personal “apostasy” of uncountable

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individuals during my lifetime—beginning the numbering with Elvis and continuing right on through Diana Ross, Amy Grant, and Brittany Spears. None of these or the rest of the pathetic number of fellow travelers could have made a living singing “Shall We Gather At The River”—but they would have been more successful at life. Does it not strike my reader that adopting the world’s music is the lowest common denominator in the backsliding or apostasy of all of these ex-church choir members?

Do not misunderstand me; I would not presume to nominate “Shall We Gather At The River” as one of the premier musical creations of American Christianity; even Robert Lowery wrote many songs [maybe as many as 499] that some would rate “better.” The music does not portray a profundity of talent and the words do not display a proficiency in theology. Both words and music are so simplistic as to be labeled by more than a few as rather trite. Perhaps this apparent shallowness is why the Contemporary Christian Music aficionados use this song among their repertoire of examples to scorn that which they label disdainfully as “traditional” Christian music. I would agree that I could not imagine any arrangement of this song where the delivery could elevate the performer above the rank of average. The vocal range of no tenor is challenged and no bass is troubled. A mezzo-soprano would not select the song for an encore at the Metropolitan. Probably Tennessee Ernie Ford and Jim Reeves were the only singers ever able to achieve making the song a salable record. I doubt the song would lend itself to a choreographed DVD—the 1950s term for choreography was “song and dance.” Somehow, brushes on snare drums and chiffon on limbs do not seem appropriate with this tune; therefore, it lacks the essential ingredients for promotion in the worldly churchliness of today. I also willingly concede that the words are never lost in the beat of the music; therefore, it would have very little appeal to the contemporary generation. The song may be adapted to a wide variety of instruments quite well; however, no jazz combo would find it soothing, and the blues singers do not seem to be tempted to mutilate this song as they so gleefully do the National Anthem and Amazing Grace. Therefore, musically the song would probably receive a failing grade in contemporary MU 101.

The musical composition has neither the beat nor the rhythm to enable either swinging or swaying, lacks the fervor and flavor to produce either euphoria or ecstasy, and sounds churchy. The lyrics assume that the listener or singer possesses a modicum foundation of Biblical knowledge and assumes specifically that the singer or listener has a general familiarization with the Book of The Revelation. Therefore, since the tune cannot be used for dance music, and the words demand thinking, reasoning, and contains an actual “story-line” as opposed to vain repetition,

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cially sponsored by temples and the governments. Religion continued as the recognized patron of arts until the modern era. Pilgrimages to the more elaborate and, therefore, more glamorous sites were major sources of income for an expanding and thriving tourist industry. The entire livelihood of certain cities was funded by the theaters and temples. Empire-wide, there was no Gentile population center that failed to construct its own entertainment complex. The pampering and feeding of the fleshly appetites became the focal point of existence and no city was more devoted to entertainment than the capital of the Empire. While the entire Empire became famous for local circuses, none equaled those held in Rome. The unique Coliseum in Rome was an engineering marvel that remained unequaled until the erection of the now trashed and nearly destroyed Super Dome in New Orleans. Drama was as dominating to the Empire of Nero as television in the 1950’s was to America and music was not far behind—choirs were abundant and festivals were plentiful. The whole of the culture of Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Tarsus, Damascus, even Caesarea was centered on these great theaters. [Interesting note: Only in the Jewish cities of Judea were theaters not constructed.] The essential elements of theater have never exceeded those of the days of the apostle. The innovations of the following centuries have only been in the techniques of production, especially in the particular ability to bring the theater into the private home.

THEREFORE, IF the apostle Paul had desired to do so, he could easily have produced “The Passion of the Christ” in living Technicolor complete with surround sound. How much easier it would have been to have the crowds come to him than to be “In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness” [2 Corinthians 11:26-27] going from “house to house” [Acts 20:20], from synagogue to synagogue, and from one persecution to the next persecution. However, in the very midst of that entertainment-driven culture of the Roman Empire, the apostle declared that it was *by the foolishness of preaching that God had ordained to save them that believe*. The apostle repudiated the idea of human gimmickry being substituted for the preaching of the Gospel. When he said that he became “all things” to all men that he might “by all means” win some—he obviously was not including the use of the entertainment opportunities of his day. When Paul wrote that he could rejoice even when Christ was preached in pretence,” he did not have the theater in mind. [Philippians 1:18 “What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ

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how much tithe money is stolen in 2005 for the pursuit of Christian diversions—not by the entertainers, but by those who use tithe money to attend concerts, buy cd's, and otherwise pursue Christian amusements. The first Christian amusement park opened in the 1970's according to the best information available. [No one should have any doubt how old John Bunyan would have described the Vanity Fair flavor of Jim and Tammy Bakker's [and later Jerry Falwell's] water slide.] Several such enterprises exist today. Today, multiple individuals and organizations of varying levels of talents make their living by providing amusement, fun, and enjoyment for those nominal Christians who have the leisure to devote disposable income to the frequent pursuit of *diversion*. It is not secretive information that the income of the CCM industry alone was greater far in 2004 than the *combined* mission giving of several Baptist groups. That is travesty and sin. I make no apology for so writing. I would say it stronger, if I knew the proper words to do so.

"Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" is not a Bible verse and it is not a Biblical principle. The Americanization of Christianity has not been progress toward godliness. I have written before of the curses of "assembly line Christianity" and "marketing." The American concept of "always bigger and ever better" has created the monstrosities termed "mega-churches" with their multiplied merchandizing in the McDonalds®, Starbucks®, and other assorted enterprises. We have more caricature of Christianity across the land than we do a proper patterning of New Testament Christianity—one could legitimately come close to using the term "burlesque" to contrast Americanized Christianity with Biblical Christianity. Recently, I was reading one popular writer as he described salvation as "our learning to cooperate with God in implementing his [sic] plan in our lives." That is a gross misrepresentation, a crass distortion, a vulgar falsification, and a completely inaccurate representation of the Gospel—a burlesque caricature would indeed be a fitting title. Yet, multiplied ministries are following this new *maharishi*. The mantra for the devotees of this guru is "it works."

You may think I have drifted far from my topic of "The Role of Music in Apostasy." I assure you that I have not. Music is the lowest common denominator in the formula producing apostasy.

I find it extremely intriguing to consider that the apostle Paul lived at the time when drama was reaching the culmination of its greatness. The Roman lust for opulence and amusement combined to produce the most elegant theaters the world had seen—designed and constructed so the great Greek comedies and tragedies could be enjoyed. Those plays were intimately connected with the national religions of Greece and Rome combining entertainment and worship. Playwrights and actors were finan-

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"Shall We Gather At The River" is not destined "for the charts." The song, however, lends itself quite well to a serious discussion of several pertinent issues that are worthy of attention.

For example, consider the obvious, but forgotten, truth that—until the last decades of the twentieth century—Christian music was never intended to generate an income for the composer or the performer any more than the tune was designed to demonstrate the versatility or the range of the artist. Actually, in those less pretentious days of yore, a singer would have been seriously offended to be identified as either a performer or an artist. Unbelievably perhaps, there was indeed a time when hymns and Gospel songs were written for the singular purpose of honoring the God of Scripture. Robert Lowery did not write the words or the music so that he might achieve wealth or stardom. He was not motivated with a desire to have people seeking his autograph, let alone selling it. He had no agent or publicist and he did not contract with vendors to hawk his products. He used no attorney to market his endorsement for products. The song was not "produced and directed"; it was written and, then, sung. Ministry and profit were not synonyms in those days. My, the changes that have come in the span of my ministry life. Songs are not birthed by praise in the heart in this age; rather they are generated by surveyed themes and proven marketability. "How many will it sell?" is the chief consideration.

My ministry goes so far back into history that I remember when evangelists came with an entourage consisting of a Bible and a couple of suits for a two-week revival meeting. More than once, my wife did the laundry for the guest preacher during the meeting. There came a day when a preacher showed up with an extra suitcase of eight-tracks and cassettes *requiring* a table for display and asking for a volunteer to collect the money from the sales. There was a stirring in those days within great numbers of Baptist churches about "the money changers and the tables." As is usually the case, after enough exposure, the resistance from within withered away—more likely, it was just simply worn down by the badgering of carnality.

I well recall the time when a guest preacher accused me of destroying *his* income by not allowing him to take time in the service "to promote" his merchandise. "I live off what I sell," said he. I thought he was an evangelist dependent upon love offerings—but he corrected me, "My *real* income comes from the sales." On another occasion, an evangelist became incensed because I would not let him "take the offering" for himself—he was certain that he could do a better job than I was doing and said so. This is not an indictment of evangelists; it is an observation of the change that has come. I know that what I have written will be taken from context

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and used to smear good men; that is not the intent of this preacher. The profiteering problem is a more widespread virus than an evangelistic flu; it has infected every "level" of the ministry. The typical preacher—evangelist, missionary, pastor, and the various titled almost-pastor—has become professional; and professionals, as the worlds of sports, law, and entertainment have proven, seek to receive compensation in proportion to talent and performance. Check with almost any pulpit committee and you will discover that there is great interest expressed on the part of "candidates" concerning the "package of compensation and benefits." The men of the past that believed that the LORD of the Harvest called them to a place and went, trusting Him to provide for sustenance and security, seem to be lacking in this era; but that is the Biblical pattern.

[Luke 10:2-12] 2 Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest. 3 Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves. 4 Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes: and salute no man by the way. 5 And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. 6 And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again. 7 And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house. 8 And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you: 9 And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. 10 But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, 11 Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. 12 But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city.

I add only one more comment—ministry, Biblical ministry, Holy Spirit called ministry, is not a profession, it is a life. The professionals are hirelings and they will leave the sheep that are entrusted to their care at the first indication of personal discomfort. [John 10:12-13] We have a curse of Balaam, Gehazai, and Demas *clergy* scattered all through Baptist ministries; we desperately lack some Micaiah, Jeremiah, and Paul preachers for the hour that is upon us. Timothy was to commit the ministry to "faithful men," not talented, charismatic, upwardly mobile men. I must leave this aspect until another article.

Returning to the subject of Christian musicians—in this field, the change is even more dramatic than among preachers. The difference be-

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tween P. P. Bliss, Homer Rodeheaver, Harry Clarke, Phil Kerr, the original George Beverly Shea, and the 2005 Contemporary Christian artist is literally the distinction of two dissimilar worlds. A red tie or a bright sport coat was the extent of the theatrical touch from the "song leader." The contemporary *Worship Pastor* and his/her worship team are decorated with the latest Tommy Bahama or Reyn Spooner attire and are schooled and skilled in the techniques of what was once simply labeled "showmanship." The performances appearing weekly in today's mega-churches are skillfully choreographed, polished to perfection through weeks of rehearsals, and presented digitally re-mastered, enhanced, and, apparently, sometimes lip-synched. The light and sound equipment traveling with the typical CCM performer in 2005 represents a larger dollar investment than the full construction cost of individual church buildings in which "Shall We Gather At The River" was sung for generations. It was a day called "Paradigm Shift" when that first quartet discovered that a school bus could be converted into temporary lodging and used to travel from one Gospel sing to another. The day of Christian entertainers was born.

Let me write that again. This is the day of Christian entertainers. I cannot emphasize enough that this is a dramatic alteration in the pattern of centuries of believers. One will search the histories in vain for any reference to Christian jesters, clowns, comics, performers, actors, or dancers. Do not attempt to confuse the discussion by interjecting medieval artists (painters) and musicians. During the Middle Ages, neither artists nor musicians were ever employed as entertainers for worship activities in religious settings and none received income from Baptists or Baptist forerunners. There was no such occupation as Christian entertainer from the days of the apostles until the last five or six decades. Entertainment is, by definition, "a diversion or amusement." How on earth [a carefully chosen phrase] does a person waging warfare with "the world, the flesh, and the devil" find time for diversions and amusements? Beginning as a trickle of a few singers and instrumentalists, the flood now flows with a multiplicity of "professions." Former salesman Jerry Clower was the first person that I knew that eventually developed a sufficient reputation so that he made his livelihood telling Christian jokes. An entire industry has evolved since he left his secular job. In contrast, Tennessee Ernie Ford was a Christian, who was an entertainer. He made a living as an entertainer, but not as a Christian entertainer. He entertained and he gave his testimony as opportunities presented the occasion—but he did not traffic on his Christian testimony to sell himself—and, according to his pastor, Ernie Ford remained consistent in his testimony after his fame arrived. Among other things that he said, the pastor [a Baptist] also remarked in my hearing that Ernie Ford never failed to tithe to his home church. I frankly wonder

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