

Building the Church with Slot Machines

After reading the title you may be thinking, "What is he talking about! Doesn't he understand that bringing gambling into the church would be wrong?" Let me build the case for slot machines and then apply it to the evangelical church.

The Case for Slot Machines

To my knowledge no one seriously advocates the use of slot machines in today's church. But, there is a credible argument for the practice. First, there is no verse in Scripture which prohibits gambling. Second, slot machines in the church's foyer would attract a crowd which presently has little interest in the church. Their attendance opens the door for presenting the Gospel. The potential evangelistic outreach could be staggering, not to mention the discipling opportunities. Third, it would help alleviate the financial burdens churches face. The revenue produced by the machines could be used for a number of missionary projects. The church's numerical growth would mean larger offerings to offset general expenses. So, why haven't church leaders jumped on this unique outreach?

The Church's Dilemma

I use slot machines as an example of how far the church's direction has moved from the biblical model. I know of no church using slot machines. The thought is repugnant, however, the arguments supporting a "gambling outreach" are the same as those used for introducing contemporary worship styles into corporate worship. For the sake of brevity, I will focus on contemporary music frequently found in evangelicalism.

One pastor is quoted in the Shelbyville News defending contemporary worship by saying, "Down the road, churches will have to move to contemporary worship in some form, or they'll cease to exist." Many church leaders agree. Consequently, drums, guitars and keyboards have replaced pianos and organs in an attempt to create a more contemporary sound. Even Christian radio stations broadcast music which (with the exception of words) mimics their "rock station" counterparts. The "music of the street" has captivated the church. Older people tolerate it. Younger people enjoy listening to the "beats" which pump pulse-pounding life into the service. Could anything be wrong?

Ask any worship leader why he/she uses contemporary music and the answer will be the same - let's call it the "slot machine argument." The defense is, "There's nothing in the Bible specifying a particular rhythmical pattern as "Christian." We are concerned with attracting the unsaved. Traditional Christian music is dry and boring to the community. We have to be culturally relevant in order to survive. More people means more opportunities to win the lost. New converts are discipled, the church prospers and is enabled to expand its outreach." Sound familiar? The same reasoning can be used to justify slot machines.

Wrong Questions - Wrong Answers

While intentions may be good, many church leaders start out with wrong questions. In planning corporate worship services they ask themselves, "How can we attract and hold people in our community? How can we breathe life into our service so that attendees will

see the relevance of Christianity? What can we do to keep from losing the younger generation?" If plans are developed based upon these questions, worship evolves into performance and entertainment. The questions are not bad, they are simply misplaced. They are wrong because they are out of order. They do not follow the biblical pattern.

The first question every church should ask is: What is the biblical purpose of a corporate worship service? The Apostle Paul answers, "...until we all reach unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God and become mature..." (Eph.4:12-13). Here is the biblical model. The corporate gathering is for the Christian. It is a time to come together to hear from God through His Word and to respond to Him. One element of that response is our singing. We stand in the presence of God, corporately lifting our voices in praise and adoration, appreciating God as He has revealed Himself in the Bible. The music should be appropriate to the occasion. When the president of the United States enters a room, the band doesn't play "Rubber Ducky, You're the One." When we sing before God, our music ought to reflect the proper respect and reverence due to our Creator. The "music of the street" cannot accomplish that purpose.

Historically, the church's music (while evolving) has always maintained a distinctive pattern separating it from cultural fads. Today, cultural fads shape the church's music. However, the Bible should govern the "patterns" of our worship. Those "patterns" begin with a clear understanding that the corporate worship service is primarily for God's children. It is for the "equipping of the saints." God's people are to go forth from the service to be better witnesses and testimonies to the grace of God in salvation. Thus, as His people proclaim the truth, friends and neighbors are evangelized and brought into the Church. As new converts grow and mature, they go forward to evangelize others. In other words, growth, encouragement, learning, and maturity are processes cultivated in corporate worship. Evangelization of non-Christians is the result of the "spiritually maturing" spreading the gospel wherever they go. That is the biblical model which shapes the "worship activities" in a biblical Church.

It is easy to think, "What difference does it make?" But, the policy which begins with, "How can we make our service more attractive" opens the door to evolving and serious compromise of biblical principles. That reasoning can be used to justify any practice, including, "bringing slot machines into the church."

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