

## It's Not About Me

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Sunday, 22 February 2009

One of the great problems in our day is that many people fail to recognize the nature and the purpose of the church. They have not come to terms with what God intends for churches to be. In fact, evidence of this misunderstanding abounds in the religious world today. Many people have one basic concern when it comes to which church they will attend: "What am I going to get out of it?" or "What's in it for me?" They approach religion the same way they approach almost everything else in life—*as consumers.*

This fact was brought home to me a number of years ago when a large inter-denominational church aired a commercial in which it announced that it would begin offering variety in its worship services. Each of their three services was to feature a different "style" of worship from the others. The commercial began with children approaching an ice cream truck. The children each ordered his or her favorite flavor only to find out that the only available flavor was vanilla. As the children sat on the curb eating their vanilla ice cream, you could see the disappointment on their faces. The implication is obvious. Variety is good, and it's to be expected. Therefore, choose which flavor of worship suits you best.

The problem with that kind of thinking is that it turns everything around. We are not consumers whose only concern is what pleases us. We are servants who are responsible for giving our Master what he commands. Worship is, first and foremost, a God-centered activity, not a people-centered activity. David captured the essence of worship when he said, "Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness" (Psalm 29:2). If this is the chief aim of heavenly beings (cf. Psalm 29:1), it should be ours no less. To worship God is, at least in part, to ascribe to him the glory due his name. He is the object and the focus of worship.

It's not likely that many among us would fall for such a blatant violation of the intended purpose of worship, substituting our desires for God's will. We recognize that God has always expected worship to be in keeping with his revealed will. We've learned that lesson from Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1). But there is nonetheless a principle we need to keep in mind. When we come together, it's not about us. Certainly, God intends for his people to get something out of their association with other saints. But we make a mistake any time our primary concern is what's in it for us. One of the great dangers in our day, even among our own people, is seeing the local church as nothing more than an organization that provides a service to the members of the church—even if they recognize that the service is spiritual in nature. When we come to services, who is being served? Do we have a tendency to think more about what we ought to get out of the services than we do about what we are to give? Those who get the least out of services are often those who put the least into them. That is not a coincidence. This problem may be more subtle than a wholesale move toward religious consumerism, but it's there all the same. People are sometimes more concerned with what they get than they are with what they can give.

We must learn to give God our best. He expects nothing less. But we must also learn to serve others as well. The writer of Hebrews pointed out that one of the reasons we come together is to stir up one another to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24-25).

"So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Philippians 2:1-4).

Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39). These words apply just as much to the public assembly as they do to any other part of life. It's not about me.