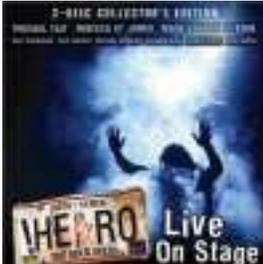
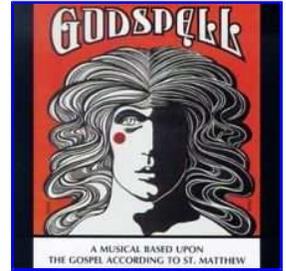


March 22 2008: Christian School Theatre

Desert Christian High School put on their spring theatre production of [Godspell](#). Charity, who is a sophomore at DCHS and who entertains notions of going into theatre arts, was on stage crew. Since she was involved, Mommy had to get tickets. We saw it today.



This is an odd story for me. I had heard that "Godspell" was a rock opera, along the lines of the more recent [!Hero](#), but I had never seen it. Years ago, when my family lived in the D.C. area, we visited the [Ford's Theatre](#), where Lincoln was shot - "Godspell" was playing. Somehow that made such a link that to this day, I get confused between "Our American Cousin" and "Godspell" as to what play the Lincolns went to on that night.

So I didn't mind at all seeing it. And I think that the young people did a good job. However, all the way through, I was being my usual critical self, and trying to determine in what way it was, or was not, "good".

## 1. Christian Entertainment

Let's start with the sharpest barbs.

This goes right along with the general recognition that the church is in trouble, that the level of commitment is shallow, that young people are leaving as soon as they can. One of the standard features of the institutional church is the "children's choir", a "program" in which the children of church members are coached to sing some age-relevant religious songs or do a musical drama or some such, for the purpose of performing for their adoring parents. This is usually defended with reasons like "the children are learning to lead worship", or "the children are learning about God", but the real reason (and everybody knows it, even the children) is to entertain the parents (who are often the only ones who attend the performance) with the spectacle of their little dears on the stage.

Well, guess who was attending the DCHS production of "Godspell"? Yes! Parents, grandparents, teachers, there for the purpose of seeing their teens perform on stage. Including me.

Additionally, it is worth considering that, when children associate their songs and their plays with entertaining their parents or the grown-ups in the church, it trivializes the message and doctrines in their hearts. For instance, Ken Ham of [Answers in Genesis](#) has the [theory](#) that teaching children just Bible stories, without more context, reinforces the cultural prejudice that religion isn't "real", but Science (and the other stuff taught in public schools where they spend most of their time) is "real". If the church is shallow, and faith is not the primary guide in the lives of adult Christians, it is something taught at an early age. This is a pattern that has been in the institutional church for a long time.

So what was the *purpose* of the DCHS spring theatre production? To entertain Christians? To generate pride in parental hearts? To trivialize matters of ultimate reality in our young people? *NOT* good.

## 2. Cultural Outreach

The purpose of "!"Hero", as I understand it, was to present the Gospel to an audience of young urban unbelievers in terms and with cultural motifs they could identify with. Plus, to put on a big, spectacular show

with relevant rock music styles to get them to suspend their cynicism just for a while. *GOOD* purpose. Regardless of how successful it was.

This is the object of a lot of "Christian" films, some which tend to be preachy (and therefore unsuccessful, and even embarrassing and counterproductive), and some which do better at contacting the target culture, like [Second Chance](#). "Hero" was run in civic theatres (if not just because it was too big and stage-elaborate to run in a church building). Evangelistical films are run (usually with difficulty, and short terms) in regular cinemas. The object is to reach unbelievers.



Desert Christian sends packs of kids to Mexicali every year on "mission" trips. Yet "Godspell" was marketed to school parents, rather than Tucson teens who might be intrigued to see some peers put on a well-known musical play in a non-church establishment. Who knows; it might have had an effect similar to what [Tony Gonzalez](#) experienced!

However, it might not have worked if they had. The best **witness** is someone with a story that relates. Like [Nicky Cruz](#), of "Run, Baby, Run" fame, who can connect with urban youth and gangsters *because he WAS one*. The DCHS production of "Godspell" was set in the inner city. And played by upper-middle class kids from the suburbs. I guess this isn't a serious hang-up, since "Hero" is played by rich&famous musical stars, and "West Side Story" is played by Hollywood actors, and they do a convincing job. But I couldn't tear my mind away from the contrast.

### 3. Christian Influence in the Arts

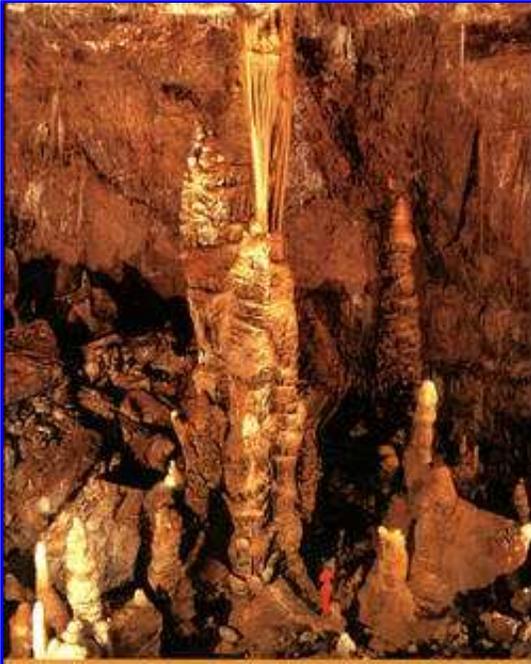
One of the big things behind the Worldview movement is to recognize that Christians *make* culture when they engage in the [arts](#). It doesn't have to be for the purpose of evangelism, per #2 above, but it has to be *Christian*. Lots of young people in Tucson high schools get into the arts with dance, theatre, sculpture, video media, etc. One would hope/expect *Christian* young people to do the same, but mark their art with their convictions.

There is often controversy about "crossover" bands, which are composed of Christians, but they do not sing exclusively "Christian" songs or market themselves to the "Contemporary Christian Music" genre. ("Switchfoot" comes to mind.) I applaud them! I appreciate the "Christian" groups for providing thoughtful lyrics and worship music for our spirits, but I certainly salute the "Crossover" groups for taking their Christianity into their art. Assuming they are taking their Christianity into their art, and not hiding it or apologizing for it.

DCHS is quite the school for drama. The upper classmen put on a fall and a spring production every year. Lower classmen can help with things like stage crew. Some kids take a taste for theatre with them afterwards. The problem is, I know where these kids come from, what kind of churches they attend, what characterizes their youth groups. I know some of those kids. Per #1, their commitment is shallow. Not universally, but in general. The school perpetuates this shallowness even with the drama, because the *purpose* of the drama production is the *drama*, not the *Lord*. Even though I'm sure the drama teacher leads the cast in prayer before the show begins (rather the same way Baptists pray before the business meeting), the school misses the chance to teach a *Worldview* approach to everything - including the arts.

So the "art" of these young people was Good. But they missed the larger lesson of *purpose*. *Not good*.

March 19 2008: Creation/Evolution at Kartchner Cavern



Every so often, my sister Becky and her family visit from Colorado, and this week is one of those times. When they do, the entire Ormand family is together in Tucson, and we usually plan a mass family outing. This time, we went to visit [Kartchner Cavern](#) (here's some other handy links, [here](#)), and [here](#). Kartchner Cavern is one of the better Arizona State Parks, and is less than an hour from Tucson, on the road down to Fort Huachucua. There are two main attractions, the "Throne Room" (with the amazing huge feature pictured above) and the "Big Room", which is closed most of the year to avoid bothering the bat colony that migrates in every year. This was the time of year that the "Big Room" was open, so we siezed the opportunity.



You can see with all the kids, there's a lot of us, and we filled one tour group all by ourselves!

Kartchner is a "living" cave, with water flowing (very slowly now, due to the prolonged drought in the region) and formations growing, so the Park takes great care to preserve the environment. So it is actually *warm* in the cave, rather than the constant 72F that Carlsbad boasts. We had two tour guides. One was a joker - my

favorite line:

**Q: What is the difference between a "cavern" and a "cave"?**

**A: A "cavern" has a gift shop.**

The other was a regular park ranger, with the campaigner's hat and the badge and all that. And an advanced degree in environmental studies and archaeology, he told us when we asked. Before the tour started, he was giving us the usual spiel about how millions of years ago, a shallow sea covered the region. We sat there with polite smiles, and during a pause, my dad offered, "We don't really believe all that. We're creationists."

Uncomfortable laughter. Off we go on the tour. Kartchner is a fascinating place. Partly because of the efforts to retain moisture in the cave (a series of air locks). Partly because (for me) the tunnels cut by Arizona hard-rock miners to provide public access to the caves. Mostly because, as opposed to other caves I've visited, you can see the water dripping down on the formations!

## Growth of calcite formations

Of course, we keep hearing the story of how slowly the formations grow. For instance, flowstone grows at the rate of a few milli-inches in a hundred years. Of course, that means the formations would be thousands of years old. On the other hand, Mr. Ranger points out a stalagmite with an embedded bat body. Looks like *that* stalagmite grew pretty fast!

It all depends on external weather conditions as to how much water seeps in, dissolves calcite on the way, and deposits it on formations in the cave. The Southwest's weather is highly variable. We had a "hundred years flood" just a while ago (10 years?) that filled every wash and river in Tucson, and swept cars and trailers and even houses into the beds. I'll bet that year accounted for more than a few milli-inches of flowstone!

When I was in Washington D.C. several years ago, I visited the Lincoln Memorial. There is a gallery underneath the statue (I seem to recall), with viewing ports where you can look at the "basement" under the Memorial. I was blown away to see a huge stalactite down there! I must be remembering correctly: here's other accounts: [A good one](#), and [another not from a creationist perspective](#). So clearly, the slow rate of growth of cave formations observed *NOW* has nothing to do with the age of the formation!

## Radiological Age, Part I

At another point, the path through the cave bent around a huge formation that had fallen over. Mr. Ranger took the opportunity to tell us more about how ancient the formation was, how it had been dated to hundreds of thousands of years. My sister Becky asked, "How can we know?" The two guides very briefly described the old-age radiometric dating methods of Uranium/Thorium and Potassium/Argon.

One of the BIG problems with the radiometric dating methods is the unfounded assumptions required for its application. To calculate *anything*, one has to assume that the initial concentrations of parent and daughter isotopes are known, and that they did not change over time for any reason other than radioactive decay. Any reason like transport of elements in solution. In a cave formation formed by mineral solutions. The unthinking acceptance of the "scientific" dogma is breathtaking.

## Radiological Age, Part II

But then my sister asked, "What about carbon-14?" I'll bet the rangers get this a lot, for the most widely publicized dating method is Carbon-14. When "scientists" tell us how old the earth is, or some geologic feature, they simply say "millions of years", and the public simply accepts this, without (unlike my sister) asking how we know. But when we find evidence of human civilizations, or the remnants of a supposed human ancestor, they often include "as dated by Carbon-14." So people *hear* about Carbon-14. They don't often hear about Uranium/Thorium or Potassium/Argon or the Isochron flavours of these methods.

So the ranger quite correctly responds, "Carbon-14 would have all decayed in 100,000 years." Given what we know *about carbon-14 in our contemporary setting*, this is correct. I was biting my tongue to point out to them that Carbon-14 is found in [diamonds and coal deposits](#) that are supposedly millions of years old.

(Here's another [link](#) to a dialog that reveals the suspicions of the "scientists" when confronted by "facts" like this.)

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So here's the setting: We start a tour with some professional evolutionists by discretely and non-confrontationally asserting our position. Our little group of (mostly home-schoolers and) creationists politely listen to the perspectives of the evolutionists during the tour. Once, when the subject comes up, we ask some probing questions. We don't debate with the guides, we don't become ad-hoc guides with an alternative perspective, like I hear other groups do, who go to natural history museums *for the purpose* of confronting the establishment.

I suppose some might disagree with me, thinking that confronting the establishment is the right thing to do. My take is, other than becoming notorious (like Pat Robertson or Jim Bakker notorious), and encouraging the museum and Park Service staff to prepare strategies to deal with those pesky, commandeering creationists, we do very little good with this approach.

In fact, as my dad pointed out afterwards, we don't know what the guides believe personally. They are employed by the establishment, and their jobs depend on presenting the establishment line. Really, one can't even talk to them about such things during their working hours and expect anything other than disagreement.

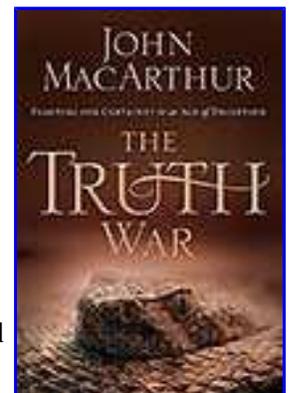
So I think we did the right thing. And I was proud of my little gung-ho homeschooling relatives to keep the lid on!

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February 20 2008: Are You "Emerging"?

Courtesy of [SmartChristian](#), I've found a great website for [Reclaiming the Mind Ministries](#). In addition to the other resources on this site, the philosophers and theologians have a blog, "Parchment and Pen". C. Michael Patton has run a great series on The Emerging Church, in reaction to a [book](#) by John MacArthur, in which all post-evangelicals are allegedly painted with the same heresy brush.

I love charts (could you tell?). Apparently, that makes me a Modern, using tools to organize and structure my thought into linear and analyzeable patterns. Oh, well. Michael has some great charts, that have sparked quite the discussion in the evangelical and emerging blogosphere. Check them out:



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- [Part 1](#), where he introduces the problem and introduced the more controversial chart.
  - [Part 2](#), where he explains what he means by "Orthodox", after being challenged for why he puts Evangelicalism at the center of orthodoxy, and puts some Emergents outside. He also enhances his original chart.
  - [Part 3](#), where he takes a first cut at defining "Emerging" and "Emergent".
  - [Part 4](#), where he defines what (his analysis says) an Emerger is. This is a great article, with great charts.
  - [Part 5](#), where he does into greater detail about what marks an Emerger.

I really like this last article. It allows me to assess (by C. Michael Patton's criteria, which I think are quite reasonable) whether I am an Emerger myself.

- **Emerging Ecclesiologicaly:** Yep. That's me. Less formal, reject large (especially "Mega") churches, experimental.
- **Emerging Epistemologically:** Nope. I know that humans are finite, and we have only limited ability to know that what we know is absolute truth, but that doesn't imply that we *can't* know what is absolutely true, even partially, to a useful extent.
- **Emerging Theologically:** Partially. I'm not hung up on denominational labels, I recognize that many (maybe most) catholics are really Christian. However, I hold to the traditional creeds, and accept the value of systematic theology, although I don't think anybody comes off the clear winner.
- **Emerging Sociologically:** Yep. At least mostly. I won't pierce my ears or lips (for good reason - "I am not my own, I have been bought with a price"), but I can certainly accept those who do without cultural revulsion. Ditto for my Southern Baptist teetotalling heritage.
- **Emerging Politically:** Partially. I don't identify the Republican Party with the interests of the Kingdom (although I *do* identify the official planks of the Democrat Party as being anti-Kingdom), and I'm pro-environment... to an extent.

So by these criteria, I am an Emerger! I always wondered...

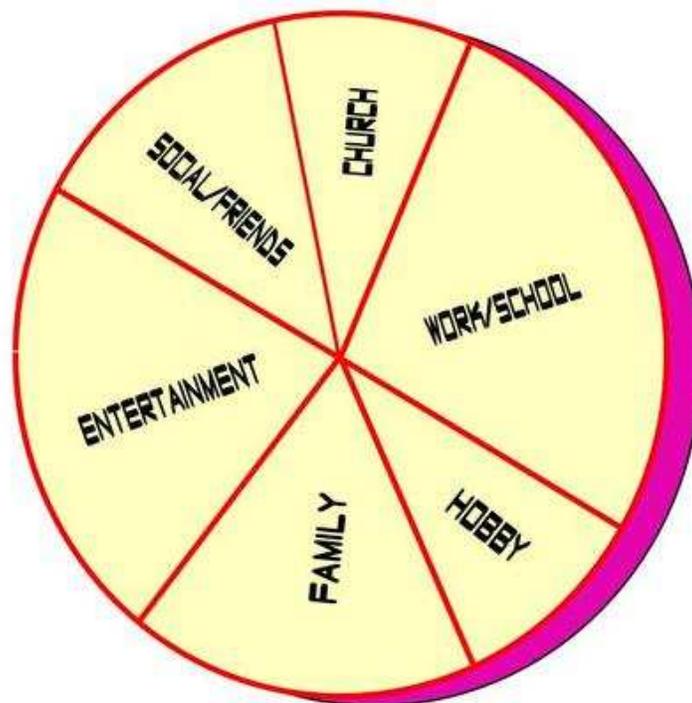
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February 19 2008: Voting for Jesus

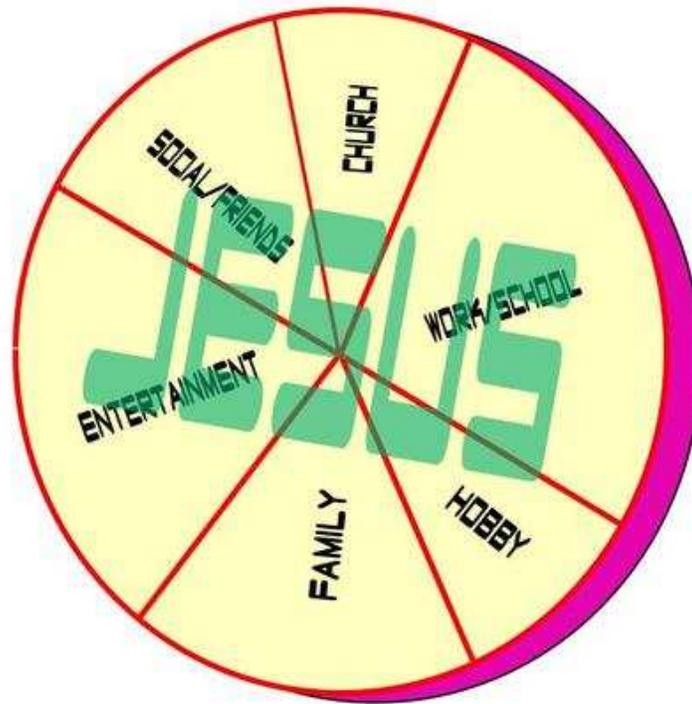
[Mark D. Roberts](#) has posted an interesting article about a church in his area that put the following election-year-relevant message on their marquee:



Mark goes on to recognize that it isn't merely church attendance that indicates one's voting preferences, but *everything you do*. I like to show this with the (infamous) pie chart:



So here is your life, with all the things you regularly do, like going to school or to work, and spending time at home or hanging with your friends. There's nothing wrong with that, except that Jesus is limited to the little sliver of your life (an hour or two on Sunday morning). Your interactions with your friends and classmates and colleagues at work and family members are not marked by Spirit-controlled attitudes, and your choices for how you spend your time are not influenced by your professed love for Jesus. If you did, and Jesus colored everything in your life, it might look more like this:



The only real difference between these two life illustrations is, when faced with a choice, you either vote "Jesus" or what "**I Want**".

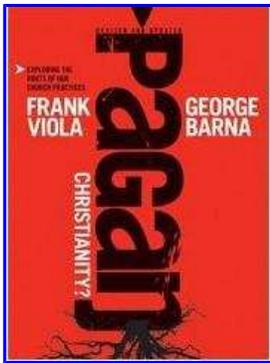
Guess which life is

- Happier?
- Shines for Jesus to the lost?
- Encourages other Christians?
- Holds the most hope for eternal reward?
- Enables the most correct attitude toward church structure, politics, even the ups and downs of circumstances?

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February 15 2008: Harmful Traditions (like music?)

I think I mentioned before how one of the playing cards in the "hymns versus contemporary music" debate is the theological content of hymns. The [President of Fuller Theological Seminary](#) weighs in on the matter. I still think this is cherry-picking; yes, there are some old favorite hymns that have deep words, but there are a lot of old favorite hymns (e.g., "I come to the garden alone while the dew is still on the roses") that are shallow and saccharine, every bit as much as the detested "me and JC" contemporary choruses. But there are contemporary songs that are theologically deep, as well (e.g., "I believe", Third Day and Ragamuffin Band has a version). The issue still comes down to what "**I Want**" and nostalgia and... well, *religious traditions*.



George Barna and Frank Viola have produced a book examining some of our religious traditions, and how "Biblical" and defensible they really are. This has ignited quite the tempest of reviews, responses, interviews, and blog postings of varying degrees of cluefulness, so it clearly has touched a nerve. For example, this [review](#) of the book has a lengthy comment section by pros and cons who are both clergy and laity, and many who give their own links to reviews and blog postings.

Part of the clueful or clueless commentary is whether or not Barnes and Viola actually recommend a return to the New Testament model (as portrayed in Acts, I assume) as the only defensible "Biblical" church model. I would hope that is not what they are actually saying, since Acts is *history*, not *doctrine*, and as most of the posters point out (and it seems Viola agrees), the New Testament church model existed in a cultural context that does not correspond to today's Western civilization.

The core of the dispute is whether or not the office of "pastor" is Biblical, or a throwback to pagan or Jewish priesthood concepts, that entered the institutional church shortly after Jesus left, was confirmed by Constantine, and was retained through the Reformation. Again, I can't believe that you can seriously argue with the weight of *doctrine* in the Epistles, let alone the clear role of the Twelve Apostles, that the office of "pastor" or "elder" or "overseer" ("bishop") is not present in Scripture. But I *can* agree with Viola and most of the posters that the church today is characterized by a professional, active clergy and a passive, disengaged laity. I've been in too many churches where the objective seems to be to get as many people as possible to sit in the auditorium on Sunday morning and be entertained by the full-time staff music and teaching ministers.

The thing is, this passive laity seems to have bought into this tradition as *normative*, even *authoritative*. The people who show up once a week and sit in the audience *don't want* to take an active role. They expect the pastor to visit the sick and win the lost and do the "good works" described in Scripture. I'd say most pastors understand that the lay people are supposed to do "good works" just as much as they are themselves, but find it *extremely difficult* to motivate them to do the slightest thing. It's well-nigh impossible to get people to fill even other institutional roles, like Sunday School teacher or Committee member.

How much this difficulty is a result of this clergy/laity distinction is arguable. How much is due to traditional perceptions of clergy/laity roles is hard to deny, I think, given our institutional churches today in the United States follow the pattern of the Church of England, which was inherited by the Presbyterian and Methodist churches that arose in England and emigrated to the States, and which itself inherited directly from the medieval Roman Catholic church. But why is it so hard to get rank-and-file believers to recognize that this tradition of an active clergy and a passive laity *is* not only unscriptural, but highly dangerous to their hope of eternal reward, to their personal relationship with Christ, and to the mission of winning new believers into a dysfunctional church?

I think it still comes down to a selfish "**I Want**" attitude. The tradition is comfortable (I don't have to do anything but show up on Sunday morning), comforting (hey, I'm a heaven-bound Christian if I play this church game), and appeals to our sense of inertia (it's always been this way, therefore it *should* be this way). "**I Want** these things, and I will resist any challenge to the status quo."

No, it isn't only lay people that have his traditional perspective. However, even clergy that recognize that the tradition is dangerous and should be altered (even discarded) are fighting an uphill battle to transform their

churches.

Books like Barna and Viola's won't accomplish much in this battle, either, for the same reason, even if they manage to give some clergy and laypeople a different perspective. Maybe it's true, that the emergent or post-evangelical church is the new Reformation.

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I've ordered the book myself, so I'll see for myself how much the controversy is deserved or not. Also, it's not quite a cut-and-dried matter; here's a "sermon" written for the "pastor" of a [Lego church](#) by its creator, who is clearly a passionate lay person, not ashamed either of her faith or of her appreciation for the (large!) institutional church.

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January 18 2008: "I Want" and Worship Music "Preferences"

Last sunday, Pastor Travis gave a sermon about the Old and the New. Both Old and New are good, but combining them takes great care. I'm thinking he made this sermon in response to grumblings by some [older people] about Element, and maybe the hispanic evangelical meetings from a few weeks ago, with the loud music and rearranging the stage... grumblings I've heard myself. I'm speculating, of course, but Travis *did* arrive at the point of worship music style. How different people have different preferences for worship music. As soon as he said *that*, my attention became sharply focused.

More "I Want"

"Preference", of course, comes from "I Prefer". Which, of course, is an alternate way of saying "**I Want**", specifically, given a choice between two or more items, "**I Want** this *more than* that". So Travis was recognizing that people's choice in worship music was driven by their desires.

In other words, the focus was on themselves more than on God. There's no question that the style of Sunday Morning worship, particularly the style of music, is very divisive in the church today, perhaps (at this point, at least in the western U.S.) more than race or doctrinal positions. This divisiveness arises from personal desires, or generational desires, fed by cultural background, expectations, and familiarities. *Not by spiritual factors!*

This divisiveness calls to mind James 4:1

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?

So, no surprise, "**I Want**" leads to church fusses, including about worship music. So is the music itself the issue? Is it even the "Old versus New" generational issue? Or is it the *motive* for choosing music styles, or anything else in the life of the church? Ultimately, it is a spiritual maturity problem. We cannot excuse the conflict over music styles by merely referring to different "preferences", when the situation of doing *anything* in the church driven by personal "preferences" indicates a lack of spiritual maturity and God-focus.

The question isn't what **I Want**, but what **God Wants**.

Everything Old was once New

Travis pointed this out in his sermon. Those hymns that the older people love so much, and believe are so

much better on so many levels that the contemporary music of the new generation? Once upon a time, *they* were the new songs, and the traditionalists of *their* day despised them for lacking the imprimatur of age. And this is true.

But it doesn't go far enough. It doesn't address the real issue, or provide motivation for partisans to repent of their attitudes.

In one sense, the hymns are not at fault. It is the attitude of the traditionalists, and a sinful human "**I Want**". If the older generation "prefers" these hymns, it really doesn't matter to them if they are reprising the role of an earlier generation of traditionalists.

In another more important sense, the hymns ARE at fault! These precious old hymns of the faith were new... when the generation of the Great Awakening and the Revivals of the 19th century wrote them. Those hymns were the expression of a powerful faith and repentance and commitment that sent missionaries to China and India and Africa, and shaped the cultures of America and England for a hundred years! But that was then... and this is now. Today's churches sing those old hymns absent the passion of the 18th and 19th century revivals. We don't understand their passion (and certainly don't have it), and in many cases, particularly with the younger people, we can't even understand the languages. We might as well be singing in Latin.

Is it really true that Old and New are both good?

The text Travis used was the familiar Matthew 9:16-17, the lesson of the Wineskins, how fresh wine cannot be put into old skins, or the skin will burst and the wine spilt. Now, in context, Jesus gave this lesson in response to yet another episode when the Pharisees questioned his lack of religious observance. So "the Old" was the religious traditions of Pharisaism, and Jesus had *nothing* but condemnation for those human-based traditions. So in context, it was NOT true that both Old and New were good, but rather that the Old was bad, and Jesus, the New, had arrived to sweep away the Old, to replace Tradition, the Law, and empty formal religious observance with Love and the Power of the Holy Spirit.

Now, in one sense, that Travis was speaking to, the Old and the New *are* both good. A church is supposed to be a family, and in a family, the older people (the grandparents) pass on important experiential life-lessons to the young children. However, to the extent that the older generation in today's church represents the Baby Boomer generation, with its fixation on getting what "**I Want**", I don't think it's a Good Thing for them to pass along those values to the new generation. The new generation of children have already swallowed too much "**I Want**" from their divorce-culture parents and a secular public school system and a materialistic economy. Rather, we need a culture of God-focus and self-denial (refer to Matthew 16:24 for what God Wants) to be passed from the Old to the New.

I'm not saying that the older generation is "bad", or that the church needs to dump old people in order to go after young people. I'm also not saying that the new generation is any less "bad" than the older one if their "preference" for contemporary worship music is similarly born from a selfish "**I Want**". I'm saying that we as a church need to go deeper to what is really holding us back from connecting with God (and incidentally showing the world - including the new generation out there - that we ARE connected with God). I think that a BIG part of what is holding us back is not facing - and overcoming - our human, sinful "**I Want**".

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This puts me in a bit of a bind. I find it hard to join the congregation in singing hymns (yes, moldy old hymns

with sickly sweet sentimental phrases) if the reason we sing them is not so much to praise God, as to enjoy a religious nostalgia. But in doing so, I become a judge of other people's motives. Furthermore, I'm not advancing the cause of spiritual maturity in my church by my self-righteous silence. It's just as bad as the Puritan attitude that only Psalms should be sung, and without the accompaniment of instruments, since Scripture never commands such. To the same extent, I am uneasy with singing the contemporary music with Element, when I am aware that the primary reason we are singing them is to create an upbeat environment attractive to unbelievers in some church-planter's strategy.

I guess I just need to focus on Jesus, and sing, either hymn or contemporary song, when it fosters an attitude of *praise*, and refrain from those that don't, and not worry about what anybody else in the room thinks. I am not answerable to them. I am answerable to HIM - for my attitudes of both *worship* and sinful *judgement*.