

## "An Inter-generational Conversation: A Bridge in Matters of Preference"

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**Introduction:** The Mackinac Bridge crosses between the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and lower Michigan. This fascinating structure connects two crucial parts of this state. We have driven across this bridge, and we can testify that the trip across is not for the weak-hearted or for the feeble-minded. Although the bridge is solidly anchored and sturdily built, drivers and bridge walkers can see through the metal grid to the water below, rather unnerving as it is. We have been told that the bridge personnel actually have a service that they provide where drivers will taxi your vehicle for you if you are wary about crossing on your own. At times the bridge is shut down because of the gale-forced winds. If you fail to cross the bridge, you miss out on the natural beauty that awaits on the other side. Would you let us for a moment be a very talkative taxi driver to cross a proverbial bridge with you?

We chose this metaphor because it pictures for us the journey that a family must be willing to take as it grows together in grace; the next generation in the family will take the place of the older generation in the church and in the world. This challenging journey is a conversation that may involve gale-forced winds of discussion, weakness and hesitancy to face change, and sometimes fear of what other people may think; but the bridge takes us to future deep, enriched, and meaningful relationships as we open up the discussion regarding preferences.

We are hoping through this article that our generation of 50s and older will experience God's work of reconciliation and gospel grace. Too frequently, we hear of broken families where moms and dads have cut off their single or married children because their children have "changed their standards," so the parents feel

or fear that they must separate from their own children, cooling the relationships. The irony is that these same single or married children love God in many cases passionately. How do we reconcile these realities in our minds and understand the situation biblically and logically? We would also hope through this article/discussion that parents could not only consider rekindling relationships with their own grown children, but also we would hope that people would rekindle friendships with fellow believers that they have written off because of their "departing" from a set of standards or what we'll call *preferences*. Big picture preferences mandated by an institution or a church have the propensity of covering the hidden idolatries within the institution rather than allowing people to determine their own preferences within biblical parameters. If someone has a heart of gratitude toward God because of the gospel and if someone is yielding to the Holy Spirit in the pursuit of holiness in sanctification, then the preferences will not jump the boundaries to blatant immodesty or gross self-attention, for example. No one is saying that preferences are left to the imagination. Preferences are always in line with God's imperatives (commands) in the New Testament.

Before we begin, we want to add here that we (Dave is 57 and Judi is 56) have had numerous intense discussions with our own three married children and their spouses. We chose not to shut them down or to refuse to hear their biblical reasoning. In fact, their love for God and their desire for ministry and their examples of unselfish service to God through their local churches inspired us. We questioned some of the "standards" that we had sincerely held, but perhaps sincerely embedded in fear or tradition or "that's what we were told." Our grown children's ministries looked very different from we had known in our past, but the spiritual life of their ministries demonstrated intense love for God and others and intense confrontation of sin.

Also, before we begin, we wanted to be sure that we understand that we all hold to a three-tiered belief system: (1) fundamentals of the faith (virgin birth, inerrancy of Scripture, bodily resurrection, deity of Christ), (2) doctrines of the faith (systematic theology with shades of variance depending on interpretation of scriptures), and finally, where we will spend most of our discussion, (3) preferences within our faith (dress standards and music standards). Here's the rub: what has happened as a result of cultural fundamentalism melding with historic fundamentalism is that preferences have risen to the level of dogma or doctrine in some circles of believers. To put this concept more simply, imagine a filing system of equally important documents. In the end of the 20th century, for some people, for the sake of illustration only, the file on wearing suits and ties was filed right behind the file labeled *Deity of Christ*. And the file on wearing culottes or jean jumpers and sneakers was behind the file labeled *Virgin Birth of Christ*. We ended up holding these preferences in high esteem (equal in our filing system) rather than seeing them as simple preferences among fellow believers. We must separate the three levels rather than considering them all "equal files": Fundamentals of the faith will never vary. Doctrinal interpretations may vary, but for simply practical reasons, one may not minister in the same church with doctrinal variance from another; however, those believers should still be able to meet for coffee and fellowship and for expressing love for one another. Someone may believe in pre-tribulation. Someone may believe in mid-tribulation. Someone may believe in post-tribulation. But those variations in doctrinal interpretation should by no means cause one to despise another. The Gospel still unites us. Folks with doctrinal differences probably simply minister in different church bodies for practical reasons. We would add that preference-making, on the lower tier of our belief system is just that: *preference-based*. Therefore, parents who will not fellowship with their children because of preference differences and friends

who have rejected fellow believers because of preference issues have elevated these personal-choice issues to a dogma level. Dogma/fundamentals of the faith are absolute. What is an absolute truth? Absolutes are solid truths for all people, at all times, everywhere, throughout history. Some of our friends have separated from us because of variance in doctrinal interpretation or preference issues. Secondary separation, or separating from a believer because of varying doctrinal interpretation or association with those that interpret areas of doctrine differently is logically impossible, frankly. If you consider yourself a secondary separatist, you must then construct a list of all the people, places, doctrines, and issues with which you do not agree. You must place a check box before each listed item. Each Christian you meet must first fill in the checkboxes completely to be sure that they agree completely with you. Then and only then will you be free to associate with them. Do people not see how illogical such a concept really is? And if you separate because of preferences, you have no grounds in absolute truth to separate unless the practices are sinful which no godly, sincere believer would desire in preferences.

So, let's begin a conversation. We will pretend that you are asking the questions or commenting because these questions or comments are posed frequently from those in our age bracket. These are real statements we've heard from our peers. Then, if you are willing to listen, we will respond as best we can biblically and logically to begin the journey across the bridge of generational divide. Here we go:

## PART ONE: MATTERS OF PREFERENCE IN DRESS

Before we open the conversation, we searched for articles that came from broad evangelical perspectives when it came to dress "standards." We found an article from *Christianity Today* entitled

"Clothing Matters: What We Wear to Church" in which the author, a former president of Wheaton, advocates for dressing up to go to church. Many would probably say, "Yes! We need to listen to this author!" However, we have some major problems with the author's pre-suppositional statements and logic as well. For example, the author equates the first fruits of the Old Testament to the "best standards" of dress in the church today. But is it not a false analogy to equate a first fruit of one's harvest with a choice of formal attire? A first fruit of harvest was God's standard for coming in faith with a pure heart. Formal attire is man's standard for coming to church possibly leading to neglecting the heart. One is biblical expectation--first fruits of a harvest. One is judgmental expectation--formal attire. Also, the author states that "when our comfort and convenience comes first" then we are not thinking correctly in our dress choices to "go to church." So are we to conclude that we must be *uncomfortable* and *inconvenienced* in order to worship properly? As much as we are deluged by "conform not to the world," the older generation has swallowed the world's standard wholly in the matter of dress code for formal attire to meet with God formally. Is that not absurd to be totally conformed to the corporate American standard of dress while professing to not be conformed to the world? Once again, the logical fallacy here is that others are concluding that if you wear more casual clothes, you do it for the sole purpose of being comfortable rather than making it a non-issue, which it should be. Let's consider that folks can actually make "what we wear on Sunday" a non-issue. If it is a non-issue, then the irony is simply this: the church body is then capable of focusing wholly on the singing, the Word, and the prayers. How refreshing! Since we have made dress a non-issue in our body of believers, we no longer focus on how our fellow believers are coming together to meet as a family of God. Being released from the bonds of expectation to look sharp, we honestly have lifted a huge weight of fear from people. And no, our folks have not then resorted to

coming in their flannel PJs.

Now, let's turn to some of the statements of our peers. We are trying to respond with grace and objectivity, biblically and logically.

***Our peer:*** My son is not a teenager anymore, so I told him that he needs to stop wearing jeans and a polo to church. He needs to dress up.

***Our response:*** While we would agree that there is an expected dress code at certain places (some stores, some fancy restaurants, some weddings), does that mean then that the church must have a dress code? Is that an understood universal dress code for one who becomes an adult, or is this a dress code that we've been taught is *THE* dress code? Why? What is the biblical basis for this code? Who sets the dress code? What is the intended message we send to our children? *God wants us to dress up when we meet with him.* Is that the message? --the message that we can look sharp but have an evil heart as long as we look sharp? What if someone for the sake of illustration is wearing a suit but looks at pornography all week? Or for the sake of illustration, what if a young man comes in with jeans and a polo shirt yet he pours over Scriptures all throughout the week? Extreme? No, we actually have people in mind using this exact illustration. But, sad to say, we tend to judge the man in the suit to be mature in Christ while we judge the young man to be immature. Herein lies the problem--a maturity judgment. Our point is that maturity in Christ is a matter of the heart.

Where does this perceived idea of *THE* dress code come from? Are we in His presence only when we go into a church building? Or is there something special about that building that demands we dress a certain way? What about churches that rent facilities like a recreation center? Then we should dress in our

gym clothes. It seems like the buildings that we define as "churches" are more pretentious and, therefore, demand attire that is white collar and upscale. We need to add here that we don't have a problem whatsoever with the guy in the white-collared shirt and suit; the problem begins when others judge the spirituality of those hearts that do not have suits and ties on.

Biblically, James actually rebukes the gathering where the well-dressed are rejecting the "underdressed." This perceived dress code is of our own making. Imagine going to an Eskimo village or the jungles of the Amazon and insisting that Christians in those places dress in suits and ties or dresses and nylons in either 70 degree below zero weather or 110 degree weather. This Western mindset of *THE* dress code is not a universal nor can it be. And bottom line, it certainly does not reveal matters of the heart and one's spirituality. Remember our discussion of absolutes in our introduction? Dress code is not an absolute, so what is it? A *preference*.

Let's even give in to your point that we should do all to the glory of God and that you think we're missing the point perhaps. Do you think that a "come as you are" philosophy is errant? The glory of God is revealed most clearly in His attributes (love, grace, mercy, long-suffering) and not revealed in clothing. None of God's glorious attributes are tied into a suit and tie. In loving others in differing attire, I demonstrate the glory of God. In showing mercy, I demonstrate the glory of God. I may change my attire to welcome all believers. And obviously, culturally, we will adjust differently depending on where we are called to minister. The decision of how to dress is more *practical* in nature than a *preconceived standard dress code* that must be adhered to in order to determine spiritual maturity. If we minister in Washington, DC, to politicians, maybe we'd wear that suit and tie. If we minister in the Yukon, maybe we'd wear a snowmobile suit. You cannot call your dress code an absolute. Again, an absolute is for all people,

everywhere, at all times. If you cannot say that it is an absolute, then it is a preference. Preferences, hence, are a matter of personal choice. If you mandate the choice for your son or daughter as our peer suggested, then you tell your son or daughter that dress code equals spiritual maturity; that teaching is anti-biblical.

**Our peer:** Everything we do is a reflection of our view of God, so we should dress in a certain way to be set apart, especially when we are in His presence. Dressing casually is not a good reflection of God anywhere we go in life.

**Our response:** So your view of God is that He wants you to dress up when you go into His presence. Are you not in His presence when you pray for your cereal? Should you not then be wearing your suit and tie or dress and nylons? Isn't the ultimate biblical picture and accurate view of God that He sees us within and totally as we are and that as believers we are in His presence constantly? So the exterior grooming and attire may be more about what my culture expects of me than what I think about God. Of course, it's understood that we are not giving anyone license to be immodest in dress as that would violate a biblical principle. However, my view of God suggests that He accepts me as I am and wants my inner man to be conformed to His grace, holiness, and love. Modesty is an entirely different study in and of itself; biblical immodesty is defined as *drawing attention to self*.

Let's note here that someone can be fully clothed yet be incredibly immodest in his/her pride, arrogance, gossip, or any of the "respectable sins" that exalt self or tear down others. We have relegated the study of modesty solely to women's attire. That's wrong.

**Our peer:** My grown, married son has long hair now (below the collar) and dresses in jeans at his church where he actually leads



the singing. He is no longer what I would consider a "peculiar people" or "set apart" as the Bible demands.

***Our Response:*** So because your son has longer hair and dresses in jeans, you conclude that he is now no longer "set apart." Let's tackle the expression *set apart*. Does that refer in any way to the length of our hair or the clothes that we wear? Let's be honest, here. Do you really believe that this young man's heart is now evil because of the outward preferences that you don't like? How do you reconcile his intense love for Christ (we actually know this young man well) and your discontentment towards him now?

Biblically, *set apart* is uniquely tied to the process that the Spirit works in us in the pursuit of holiness. However, my peer says that as "a peculiar people," we must dress differently. This translation from the King James is unfortunate because the translation is better rendered "a people for His own possession." *Ownership* is the concept, yet our peer believes that a peculiar people ties in to how we choose to dress: be odd, be different. Dressing according to how America looked in the 1940s is not equating to "I'm owned by God." It screams, "I'm from the man-created culture of the 1940s, and I'm very odd-looking for the 21st century." Being *set apart* is the fact that God is changing us through the Spirit, and we respond to the Spirit's work by obedience to the imperatives in the Word of God. Your striving to earn merit with God by having short hair or dressing in a suit is "adding" to the gospel if you really believe that you must do these things to please God. Is God more pleased with you as a child of God because of dressing sharp and cutting your hair and leaving jeans at home? Sanctification is not about the preferences; it is about the Spirit's transformation in my heart in obedience to Him. Our sanctification is a yielding to the Spirit, not managing our own religious standards to upkeep the relationship. Judi and I used to walk this

walk ourselves of dressing to please God for some merit-earning, and I would add that we "thought" we were pleasing God. But we now realize that we were striving in things that really don't matter, as they are preferences. Honestly, where we minister, we were taking a figurative hatchet and dividing the body of believers as we met together because we were way over-dressed for our area of the world. When we realized our error, we started coming in clothing that was more in line with our area (dropping the suit for a pair of nice pants and a polo; not wearing a skirt every week for instead a nice pair of dress pants and a sweater) and what happened was amazing. We felt that the body was united in a purpose of loving one another rather than a "them and us" mentality. When dress becomes a non-issue, a transformation takes place for the body of Christ. People no longer come and process those that look sharp against those that look casual. It simply becomes a non-issue, so the relationship building is released from those bonds of "What will people think of what I'm wearing?" Some say that people will judge us by what we wear. When we foster that atmosphere of judging us by what we wear, then we actually create the division. We would expect this thought pattern in the world. But in the body of Christ, we are not manipulating others with non-verbal clues: "Be impressed by me because I wore a suit" or "Be impressed by us because our daughter is wearing a dress from Gap." I had a lady tell me years ago that I needed to dress my daughter in something sharp like another family did for their daughter. The irony to me was that the daughter in the very expensive "sharp" dress was a complete dud of a personality, never smiled, and showed zero zeal for Christ. As I reflect on this pointed insult to me now, our daughter may not have had the expensive dress on, yet her bubbly, happy, joy-filled personality was infectious to all that she met. Dressing according to non-verbal clues of "I'm sharp" or "I'm spiritually mature" is an anti-biblical and worldly philosophy of competition with the outward rather than where is your heart? The church that fosters

this philosophy is fostering a worldly environment. Let's not take the world's thought pattern of impressing others (what some call God-pleasing) and create division. Making a preference a non-issue is actually quite refreshing and uniting. We must admit that since this is a non-issue in our body of believers, we really don't think about it anymore. One lady comes in her camouflage-jacket; one man comes in a dress shirt and sweater and nice dress pants; one lady comes in dress pants; one older gentleman comes in his flannel shirt and jeans; one older lady comes in a skirt. But we don't think about the "dress standards" anymore.

Those that make "dress standards" a huge issue have taken the world's push to look sharp and translated that concept into a demand on our church members to conform to that standard rather than focusing on the heart. We'd rather focus on the heart.

Let's digress a bit here to summarize with one other principle. To the younger generation, lest you think we have abandoned all dress standards, we have not. Under the umbrella of submitting to authority, sometimes, as a spiritual person, we at times must submit to a particular preference of some leader that we are mentored under. Dressing to submit to a preference of an authority is not measuring spirituality but measuring obedience and submission to someone in authority. To the older generation, we must ask, "Why do you have a standard that you require?" We must be at home with preference variations: "Older generation--listen to godly young adults." "Younger generation--submit to godly authority." For both, this is a time to teach. If we can teach our church body variances in preferences of Bible versions, for example, certainly we can teach variance in matters of dress. We can also teach variance in matters of music. Let's move onto that discussion next in Part Two of our article.

## PART TWO: MATTERS OF PREFERENCE IN MUSIC

***Our peer:*** We have a list of preferable, God-honoring music. Because you now use drums and you sing contemporary music, we believe that you are errant in departing from acceptable Christian music. We can no longer associate with you.

***Our response:*** First of all, may we ask who made you the arbiter of the only music that God likes or approves of or is glorified by?

Seriously, please think this through with us. If you set up the "standard" for music, you are saying that *YOU* have arrived at the *ONLY* music that pleases God. Do you not see how that conclusion is self-righteous and lacking in critical thinking or big world picture? For example, do you really think that Haitians or Zambians or Norwegians or Australians are all on board with listening to only non-syncopated, non-contemporary lists of acceptable music from a board of pastors in the United States? Of course not. So we come back to absolutes and non-absolutes, don't we? Absolutes are for everyone, everywhere at all times. The Virgin Birth is a universal dogma that unites us. If your approved music list is not an absolute, then it is preferential. We respect preferences for your church or school, but all we ask is that you respect the preferences of other godly believers. Why is that so hard? These folks are still saved; they still love God; they are still serving God. Are there high level preferences and low level. Is music high level preference and printing the bulletin low level preference?

We feel compelled to share our own testimony at this point in regards to music. Both Judi and I were trained in music in conservative Christian circles in the 1970s. We sincerely believed that God was *most* honored when we chose the *most* conservative music to sing, to play, and to listen to. So we were restricted to classical music, Christian music on a very short list, and boundaries that were very tightly drawn for us. We have explained to our children as we discussed trends in contemporary

Christian music that we encountered back in the 1970s that initially many of the 70s songs were very shallow admittedly. For example, an entire song could be about a lighthouse or fluffy clouds, and we had no clue that the analogy was about Christ or the Gospel. So we shied away from the contemporary Christian music of our day (1970s) because much of the music then was not really theologically rich. Perhaps there was some music out there that was deep and rich, but we believed that our preferences regarding music were *RIGHT* and others were *WRONG*; our preferences helped us to be holy, we thought. We therefore shunned others who had the *WRONG* list of music or a longer list than ours. As we retaught the principles that created the "perfect list of music" to our growing children, we found ourselves questioning the logic and theology behind those principles or actually what we now know were preferences. We could repeat the "standards of music" to our own children and to our students in college where we taught, but we could not articulate these "standards" with solid biblical reasoning. We faced our dilemma, deciding to dialogue with our godly, adult children; at the same time, we also decided to listen to a lot of contemporary Christian music. We found out that we had missed out and were missing out on God-focused, Gospel-centered, and grace-based lyrics, richly theological. Was all of the music preferable? No. Are all hymns accurate theologically? No. Did some of the styles initially not appeal to us? Yes. But we were now on a trajectory of evaluating content and style of all music. We have decided not to sing some hymns because they are weak theologically. We have decided not to sing some contemporary songs because of the weak theological content. Now we are evaluating the content rather than restricting ourselves to someone's "acceptable music list."

***Our peer:*** But does not the style of the music and the music itself associate with evil and have immoral connotation?

**Our response:** Just so we understand what you are saying, do you think that association of certain instruments with worldly music renders those instruments ungodly? Or because a genre of music with a secular background like rap music is used with Christian lyrics that the artist is ungodly as well? This argument from association is used quite often to defend the "restricted list of right music." Let's tackle this conversation from the association principle. Judi and I were reading a book recently by Curtis Allen. He explains the association principle so well. "God wants Christians working in the legal profession despite the presence of shysters. . . . He wants us working in internet careers despite the flood of pornography. . . . He wants us working in politics despite the deeply rooted corruption. . . . and He wants us involved in rap music despite all the bad stuff [its background]" (*Does God Listen to Rap?* p. 76 Kindle). What Allen was saying was that "God wants us, his witnesses, present in every area of life as a redemptive influence" (p. 76 Kindle). He is not saying that you should be doing something illegal or join with the pornographer or cheat voters or listen to seductive rap; however, he is saying that in the big picture, redemptive influence allows us to use varying arenas for God's glory. If you are calling this pragmatism, than you must label modes of redemptive influence as evil. Being a lawyer is not evil. Being an internet programmer is not evil. Being a politician is not evil. Being a rap artist is not evil. These modes of employment are not evil. Let's take other examples: certain brands of macaroni and cheese in our grocery store are owned by cigarette companies. But because of association, we are not going to reject the macaroni and cheese as evil because the mode of delivering the food to our table (the box of mac and cheese) is not evil because the owner of the company sells cigarettes. By way of another example, we buy milk from stores where distasteful magazines are sold. The mode, buying milk, is not rendered "evil" because in the same store the distasteful

magazines are sold. We still buy the milk. One more example--our dentist may gamble heavily, but we still go to have our teeth cleaned. We do not reject the mode (teeth cleaning) because we associate with a gambling dentist. Association can literally be made for *EVERYTHING* in life. Maybe your driveway was paved by a wife-abuser. But you still needed your driveway paved, right? Therefore, we must keep living in the world. Redemptive influence with Gospel focus can transform a law office, an internet programming office, a political movement, a driveway paver, and a rap artist. The Gospel can change the life of a wife-abuser. We were taught not to achieve good ends by evil means, and we would still agree. But we are defining something as evil that God has not called evil: the mode. If you cannot say that a mode is evil, than you cannot embrace the association principle, that something associated with something else is evil. A guitar is not evil because a drug-addicted rock singer uses one. Churches are not evil because you heard of a minister who cheated on his wife. But we are rejecting certain music in error because we are rejecting certain genres of music based on preference and not association with evil. The instruments and the modes are not what God has called evil. Because of association, the instruments and the modes are not evil. If certain instruments are on your list of evil because of association, then Psalm 150 must be cut out of your Bible.

***Our peer:*** But I've heard that contemporary music in churches is like being at a concert. Why go? I want to join in the corporate worship by singing.

***Our response:*** You know how no two fingerprints are alike? Well no two worship services are alike. So why do people equate one "rocking out" church to any and all churches who may have some contemporary music in their worship time? That approach of lumping all churches together in that way is a *guilt by association*

attack. A universal absolute can apply to this point: when believers gather, we are called to speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. One concept tends to promote observers: the concert-type of service where a few people perform and others observe. You probably can participate, but it does seem to be minimized. Also, hacking away at instruments just to "have a concert" can also turn into hullabaloo rather than a carefully planned liturgy. To avoid the hullabaloo presentation, we suggest lots of practice as a music team to support the other concept which promotes participants: the idea of corporate worship. Twenty-first century worship tends to favor observers rather than participators. So we would agree with our peer that corporate worship is best. But that does not mean that staying with the same songs and same instruments that we've used since the 70s is not best either. How can we help our congregations to grow in preference but in worshipping effectively as a body?

There are few practical concerns here as we discuss corporate worship to promote and to bolster participation in our body of believers. For example, (1) How musical is your body of believers? If you expect them to learn a new song every week, you are probably going to lose them to disappointment and frustration. We suggest having one new song that is the "song of the month" perhaps. Keep repeating this new song along with other new songs of the month. By the end of a year, you have taught the body 12 new songs. Unless you want a mono-generational congregation, consider the hymns and songs that the older generation have appreciated. We know that some of these hymns are not as theological strong, so sift through them. But if we are truly a multi-generational body (as most are) with elders *and* younger folks, then we will shape our worship to reflect and to target the hearts of that multi-generational body. How does that flesh itself out? Maybe as we worship together in song, you might consider including 2 traditional hymns and 2 contemporary



songs. To the older generation we say, "Be open to learn new songs." To the younger generation we say, "Don't shut down once a hymn is sung." And to the younger generation we say, "If you say to others you like music that is theologically rich, then you should be genuine in your belief to the point where you do not shut out theologically rich older music as well." Otherwise, you are being hypocritical. (2) What key do we sing songs in? If you transfer contemporary songs to a congregational-friendly melody, sometimes the performer's original melody line is too high or too low. So you must consider transposing some songs for your folks. Also, some hymnals have several songs that have notes that are sky high for only the trained soprano. We should transpose those as well. (3) We also would suggest that rather than having regular special music, we would suggest using this time to teach the "song of the month." So the body hears the song first. Then they can begin to join in. (4) If the instrumentation takes over to the point where the words are drowned out, then we have truly lost the point. No matter what instruments you choose to use, they are to be *accompaniment*. That means that they accompany, not predominate. (5) If you do plan to teach a new song, you must consider sing-ability as opposed to a complicated melody line. Maybe you could teach a simpler version of the song first or simply the chorus. And initially, it may be best to have guitar and light drumming in the initial singing of the new song so that the melody line will be heard clearly. These are just ideas for us. Some of you may be ready to burst out with this dynamic song that you've loved while you drive to work listening to it on the radio, but it does not always translate successfully to a diverse body of believers. Sometimes it falls flat. (6) Part of the philosophy of corporate worship in music is the fact that you must regularly review the *whats* of music, *whys* of music, and the *hows* of music with the people to grow in the understanding of this facet of worship. Why review? We must remind the folks in our congregations that worship in music is our personal response to

the character of God as we see His character in Scripture and experience His character in life.

***Our peer:*** But regardless of all your arguments, I'm offended by contemporary music.

***Our response:*** We sometimes feel that people use the "I'm offended" line to shut down the discussion. What is *offended* biblically? Offense in the Bible refers to "causing someone else to sin." We want to be very careful not to cause someone to sin, of course. We've heard some Christians say, "Yes, you have caused me to sin against my conscience by having me hear this music." We would totally agree with you that you should not sin against your conscience. Okay. But let's talk about your being offended. Would you be willing to evaluate if you are "caused to sin" or are you "ticked that others don't agree with your preferences"? Did you set your conscience by a preference or by a Biblically-based matter of orthodoxy? We are just asking you to reconsider the origin of your being offended. What is the basis of your strong preference? If your basis is not dogma (the fundamentals of the faith) or systematic doctrine, then you have elevated music to a belief system that has no grounds in dogma but has grounds in preference. If the lyrics in the music are theologically rich, then you are saying you do not like the style of the music, that the style offends you. Then we would say that you need to stay in a body of believers that endorses your style preference. But we would also say to love those that like other styles. The welcoming of Romans 14 goes both ways. What ends up happening many times, sadly, is that churches end up caving to the minority who "are offended" by other musical *styles*, so the churches, in fear of losing those minority members end up stagnating the growth of music and its potential ministry to all who attend. As we are writing this at this very moment, we could list multiple churches where many are ready to move forward in their preferences, but

sadly the few hold them back; the pastoral staff would say that they are practicing sensitivity to the few. Isn't that devastating when 90 percent of the members are ready to grow in their preferences yet 10 percent or fewer members strangle-hold the 90 percent? People in leadership, if they were honest, would say a hearty, "That's so true" to this scenario.

### PART THREE: A MATTER OF THE CHURCH BODY

One important note here when we talk about generational divides is the very harmful, imbedded thought pattern that prevailed for the last 30 years or so that we "go to church." Going to church is not "being the church," a grammatical rewording of a focus on sharing a newer philosophy that our grown children shared with us. We do not "go to church." WE ARE the church. What do we mean? We older folks have been in a system where at 9:45 on Sunday a.m. as cars and vans and trucks arrive to the asphalt parking lot, the church body comes alive for a moment with some singing and preaching and fellowship. But that abruptly ends at noon. For some, the body revives for a few hours on Sunday night. Then the body dies from Sunday 8 pm to the next Sunday at 9:45 am (for sake of illustration). We are the church, yet we have "weakly" generated missional community and discipleship of one another which has led to lots of hidden sin, lack of discipleship and openness and transparency, and fake depth of relationship. We are the body of believers throughout the week, so we should be developing body life throughout the week. It's hard. It takes self-discipline. It takes self-sacrifice. It takes love for the brethren. It takes confrontation. Ah, Ha! It takes all the *one-anothering* of the New Testament. We fear that many churches are filled with people living their lives deeply rooted in hidden sin because the church has fostered a "show up at 9:45 and put your best smile on" kind of "going to play church" (in many cases). And, there is the 11th commandment that the body must come

together to pray on Wednesday evening for prayer, but the prayer list rarely lists any spiritual needs of the body itself or the community needs because we are comfortable staying rather shallow in our relationships. Many prayer lists are physical needs only. And it may be that the 5 minutes of prayer is very weak, but our generation felt like preaching must happen on Wednesday evenings. Our generation tended to saturate the sponge with preaching but did not squeeze out the sponge throughout the week in living out the admonitions from the Bible. We waited to come together to pour more preaching into the sponge. However, many of our grown children have seen the need to focus on body life throughout the week with community groups, Bible study throughout the week, confrontation regarding sin, discipleship of one another. Their ministries may look very different. But what are they accomplishing? Many of them are living the New Testament local church principles. And yet the 50s and older are shunning them based on preference differences alone. This situation is grievous. We would certainly not want you to think that we are saying that all traditional churches lack community outreach and community activity within the body; but the idea is often fostered that if we can get folks to the building, we can win them. But the missional community groups of the next generation are living out their faith together reaching into schools and community centers and neighborhoods going "into the world."

***Our peer:*** When you abandon Sunday night services, you are not meeting "so much the more" as Hebrews encourages us to. You have cut the preaching opportunities in half. You just want to have more time for yourself rather than God.

***Our response:*** This is a valid question, but consider this thought: "Are people then choosing not to meet on Sunday evening simply because they are selfishly doing their own thing?" Could there be other reasons? For example, going back to what we explained in

our introduction to this section on worship as a body, many younger pastors and elders are practicing the principles of "we are the church" as opposed to "we go to church." So they are getting together in missional community groups to meet "so much, much, much the more" throughout the week. They are accomplishing, perhaps, more body life than our churches did in the 70s, 80s, and 90s where we were lulled into a "go to church" mentality but "be self-focused" all week. Many of the church members are no longer falling through the cracks and keeping sin hidden. If some are displeased with the intense focus on their walk with God, they leave the body because they did not appear to want to grow spiritually. They simply wanted to whine to someone about their issues of life. So the active body becomes a filter of sorts for genuine, growing, imperfect body members reaching out and practicing salt and light.

## CONCLUSION: MATTERS OF LOVING EACH OTHER

If you have read this conversation, and you reject our explanations which we have poured over with prayer and concern and edited over and over and over as to not offend, do you then reject us as fellow believers? Presently, all by God's grace and of Him wholly, we love God more than we ever have, we are yielding to the Spirit as He transforms us through sanctification, we are passionately grateful for the Gospel work in our lives. Does that sound like heresy? Are we going to Hell? Have we left the faith simply because of choices of preferences that vary from yours? Can we not fellowship here as we will be spending a lot of time together in Heaven. Let's start loving one another now.

In summary, here are the appeals that this article puts forth:

- Please dialogue with your godly children and peers regarding preferences.
- Please re-evaluate how you rate your dogma, doctrine, and preferences, as three-tiered or as one equal filing system.

- Please consider how you set dress code for the gatherings of your church, judging the heart based on dress code or making dress a non-issue for focusing on the heart.
- Please avoid coming to the gathering of the church with a spirit of judgment and viewing people's spirituality based on their attire. Remember Paul's command to welcome one another in the church from Romans 14.
- Please consider that dress is more of what my culture expects of me than what God does.
- Please remember that the higher dress standard may hide a desperately immoral heart.
- Please consider God's call to be owned solely by Him and reflect His character as being based on His grace and not our merit. Therefore we don't gain more merit based on our deeds. We are responding to His grace out of a grateful heart.
- Please consider the need to submit to those in the church, as commanded by God's Word.
- Please avoid bringing your list of preferred music to the church so that they must measure up to your preferences. Come with a heart to worship God, and welcome the differences as Paul did in the New Testament.
- Please remember that the association argument when it comes to music and methods would, if practiced consistently in all areas of life, drive us to live in a very small box with no one else in the box but you.
- Please consider the list of suggestions when it comes to corporate, intergenerational worship that encourages participation rather than observation.
- Please look carefully at the situation in which you find yourself "offended." See if in your desires to avoid "sinning against your conscience," you have set up a higher standard for yourself than the Bible clearly articulates.
- Please allow the church leaders to move the church forward in worship and ministry (including the music) whether the differing styles match your preferences and likes or not. Do not be the minority that rules the church and holds it hostage.
- Please pray for one another so that you can appreciate the truth that brings you together.

Our goal through this article has always been to unite parents with their godly, adult children or unite believers with other believers after long division. Even in the writing, we feared some backlash that might be hurtful. But here you have it: our thoughts that represent a 50s plus couple who have re-evaluated the preference issues biblically and logically. Thank you for listening. Godly young people, please feel free to print this article or to pass it on digitally to moms and dads having difficulty with your preferences. We'll pray that a conversation will ensue.

