

BRIDGING THE G.A.P.S. 3
“WINNING THE WORSHIP WARS,
(OR AT LEAST CALLING A TRUCE)”

G.enerations A.ppreciating P.erspectives and S.imiliarities
“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.” Hebrews 13: 8

“Be most careful then how you conduct yourselves: like sensible people, not like simpletons. Use the present opportunity to the full, for these are evil days. So do not be fools, but try to understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not give way to drunkenness and the debauchery that goes with it, but let the Holy Spirit fill you: speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; sing and make music in your hearts to the Lord and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ give thanks every day for everything to our God and Father. Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

Ephesians 5: 15-20 NEB

“Healthy churches grow, naturally and supernaturally, but there is no health without _____, and no growth without _____, and no change without _____.”

“EVERY GENERATION IS RESPONSIBLE FOR
WINNING THE NEXT GENERATION TO CHRIST.”

- BE _____ IN THE WAYS YOU CONDUCT YOURSELVES
- BE _____ BECAUSE THE DAYS IN WHICH WE LIVE ARE EVIL
- BE _____ OF GOD’S WILL FOR YOUR LIFE
- BE _____ AND UNDER THE SPIRIT’S CONTROL
- BE _____ CONSTANTLY AND REPEATEDLY
- BE _____ IN A VARIETY OF WAYS
- BE _____ TO GOD FOR EVERYTHING
- BE _____ TO ONE ANOTHER OUT OF RESPECT FOR CHRIST

1. NEVER DO _____
“speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs”
2. GOD IS THE _____
“sing and make music in your hearts to the Lord”
“give thanks for everything to God our Father.”
3. _____ IS GOOD, _____ IS BETTER, _____ IS THE BEST
“be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

Only God can end the worship wars, through the dynamic duo of _____ and _____.

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Ephesians 5: 15-20 NEB

Over the past few weeks we have been considering how the generations alive in our world today have been affected by world and social events, which have helped develop the ways we look at God, the world, and especially the church. Today we are going to bring this consideration home to where we live. We are going to consider one of the newest and most troubling phenomena to strike the church since the battle over speaking in tongues, and the charismatic movement of recent decades. This battle has even been given its own name: “WORSHIP WARS”.

Few churches seeking to reach all people in different generations have escaped it in one form or another, and we are no exception. I am no expert, and certainly don't know all the answers for every church, but I believe God has revealed to me some helpful suggestions, contained in His Scripture, that can help us as we learn to live together under the tent called FUMC.

Our tent has expanded over the past few years, and each advance has been a direct result of changes in shapes, forms, styles, and offerings of ministry. Those changes have come with a cost, but let me remind you of a principle we continue to learn around here:

“Healthy churches grow, naturally and supernaturally, but there is no health without **growth**, and no growth without **change**, and no change without **pain**.”

Therefore, let me also remind you of the foundational principle of this series, and then get to work breaking down today’s text.

**“EVERY GENERATION IS RESPONSIBLE FOR
WINNING THE NEXT GENERATION TO CHRIST.”**

For our purposes again today let me remind you that we will consider the three main generations as defined thusly: The VETERAN/BUILDERS, those born 1927- 1946 The BOOMERS, born 1946-1965, and we will lump together the GEN Xers & MILLENNIALS, those young people born 1966 to the present.

Our text today contains the truths we need to study to find some help as we continue to bridge these gaps. Paul the apostle is writing his beloved church in Ephesus, and toward the end offers them some practical advice about living like God desires. Therein are contained 8 specific ‘suggestions’, (in as much as Paul could, ‘suggest’ anything). Here they are:

BE **SMART** IN THE WAYS YOU CONDUCT YOURSELVES
BE **CAREFUL** BECAUSE THE DAYS IN WHICH WE LIVE ARE EVIL
BE **UNDERSTANDING** OF GOD’S WILL FOR YOUR LIFE
BE **SOBER** AND UNDER THE SPIRIT’S CONTROL
BE **FILLED** CONSTANTLY AND REPEATEDLY
BE **WORSHIPFUL** IN A VARIETY OF WAYS
BE **THANKFUL** TO GOD FOR EVERYTHING
BE **SUBMISSIVE** TO ONE ANOTHER OUT OF RESPECT FOR CHRIST

The eight parts of this passage (which in the Greek translation of the NT is actually one confusing sentence), can be summarized into three principles, which provide not only a Theology of Worship, but a Treaty for a “Worship War” Truce: Lets take a look.

1. NEVER DO **ANYTHING ALWAYS**
“speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs”

Paul missed the baby boom generation by just a couple millennia, but must have been of the age to appreciate variety, diversity, and multiple options. Here in this passage about not being drunk with wine, and being filled instead with the Holy Spirit, he slips in this little phrase about variety as the spice of life, and (can it be) theology of good worship. When we worship we are to sing the psalms, the hymns, and spiritual songs.

What did he have in mind? Obviously he was referring to the beloved OT Psalms, which often functioned in Hebrew and Christian worship as the liturgical guidebook, as well as the 'hymnal', of the day. What then were the hymns and spiritual songs he mentioned? No one knows for sure, but they probably included other types and forms of music besides just the psalms. "What Paul was saying," according to Mark Roberts, Sr. Pastor of Irvine Presbyterian Church, "is that one genre of music is simply not adequate for spirit-filled worship." Pastor Roberts offers his definition of the 3 types of music mentioned: "Psalms included the OT Psalms, Hymns included carefully structured musical pieces, and Spiritual Songs included more spontaneous and simple melody and textual music."

Most worship wars have centered around the issue of music. And if we'd be honest, most of the battles have NOT been about the theology of the hymns, verses the simplicity of the chorus', nor about the scripture in the chorus', verses the archaic language of the hymns, nor even about the 'biblical nature of the hymns, verses the cultural nature of the modern music, but actually about one thing: PERSONAL PREFERENCE!

With minimal exceptions, each generation tends to prefer music from their generation. The Builders prefer the hymns, the Boomers the Chorus', and the Gen X ers prefer more edgy, modern, louder, faster music. Is one better than the other? Is One more spiritual or biblical or worshipful than the other,

probably not, at least according to Paul! Most of us could stand to be reminded that variety is the spice of life, and different kinds of music have different strengths and weaknesses, and that all kinds are necessary for fully engaging God in worship.

2. GOD IS THE **AUDIENCE**

*“sing and make music in your hearts **to** the Lord”
“give thanks for everything **to** God our Father.”*

I think one of the byproducts of living in a world that is dominated by Baby Boomers, which has rubbed off on many a good Builder, and even many Xers and Millennials is our consumerist bent. There is an attitude of life that has inflicted itself upon many churchgoers today and that is, “What do I get out of it? Are my needs being met there, am I being fed there, does it make me comfortable, happy, better?” None of those things are wrong, and I hope all of them are being answered affirmatively for you here at FUMC. But they reveal a dangerous slip in our thinking.

Churches do not exist to bless and make us happy, anymore than God exists to bless and make us happy. When we worship, love and serve God, we are blessed and made happy. When we love and serve, and share in our church, that church can be a blessing to us. **BUT WE MUST GET THIS STRAIGHT.**

When we come to worship we are not the audience, **GOD IS.** Soren Kierkegaard first advocated that worship was like a great drama in which the congregation is the actors, God is the true audience and the preachers and leaders are the prompters and directors of the play. When we come to worship the Preacher is not the actor, the musicians are not the entertainers and the rest of us are not the audience; **GOD IS!** Worshippers offer true worship and God is the audience. Always we must remember that no matter what we do, take up the offering, sing the special music, run the sound system, advance the computer, play the prelude, lead the hymns or manipulate a puppet, **GOD IS THE AUDIENCE AND WE ALL ARE THE ACTORS,** joined together in song, prayer, confession, giving, silence, receiving, reading listening, thinking, deciding,

and living! Even our fellowship between services can serve as a corporate act of “Body” worship!

Although, hopefully, we all benefit from the process and acts of worship, our worship is primarily for God, and not for us! If we recognize this to be true then we will be less defensive of our personal tastes and desires. Our first question will not be, “Do I like what’s happening in this service?” but, “Does God like it?” Our second question will not be, “What am I getting out of this service?” but, “What am I offering to God in this service?” Paul reminds us that its pretty hard to sustain a worship war if we can authentically acknowledge that worship is primarily for God’s pleasure and glory, not our own!

3. **TOLERANCE** IS GOOD, **RESPECT** IS BETTER, **SUBMISSION** IS THE BEST
“be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

Let me be frank with you. We have developed a certain level of tolerance at FUMC. I hear from many, “you know I don’t like all those hymns at 8 or the drums and loud fast music at 9:30, or the repetitive chorus’ at 11, but I guess I can tolerate it as long as they don’t expect me to like it. That is a tolerance statement. We even have some who will admit, “you know I don’t like this or that, but I suppose its ok if it makes them happy, or meets there needs, but it does nothing for me. That is, at best, a respect statement. But you know what I don’t hear enough of around here? “I’m not a big fan of this or that, but if that is what it takes to reach other people with the gospel, then I’ll put my preference aside to see God at work!” I don’t hear enough saying, “I come to 9;30 even though the music is not my preference, because I love seeing kids fired up for Jesus.” I hear a few saying “I don’t like the screen in front of the cross”, but I hear fewer still saying “how nice it is to be able to see the words to the hymns, and the scriptures we read, the sermon notes we need!” Those would be statements of submission!

There are many passages in the bible promoting the same result Paul mentions here. Take Philippians 2: 3-5 for example: *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”*

Frankly, friends, I have seen little of that attitude! We might be tolerant, we might be becoming respectful, but not until we are willing to sacrifice our personal preferences, and humbly submit what we want for the greater good of reaching lost people will we see the kingdom realized here! IT IS TIME!!! We have come along way in a short time in the struggles to find an acceptable offering of worship for each generation. It is time we move to the next step. If you have made decisions about attending church this summer based on who or which group is leading, then you may need this attitude adjustment!

The end of our worship wars could be close at hand, but a couple things must happen first. We must return to the beginning of our text. Mutual submission happens not by human effort alone, but by the power and the filling of the Holy Spirit. Only the Spirit of God can enable us to submit to one another, to count others better than ourselves, and to have the attitude of Christ.

Thus the end of our worship wars will come when the Holy Spirit of God helps us to declare a truce founded on the biblical principles; by worshiping with a variety of styles and elements, by seeking God’s pleasure above our own, and by submitting to one another when we disagree about worship. I cannot end worship wars, and neither can you. But God can, through the dynamic duo of Truth and Spirit. Does that sound familiar? *“those who worship God will worship in spirit and truth.”* JESUS