

## Worship with Integrity

by Dan Adler

I recently heard of a lay worship leader who had to pull out of ministry for a while because of marriage problems that included extra-marital affairs. The news wasn't particularly shocking because, in the Christian world, this has become so painfully common. But what was even more disturbing is that this person talked about how they basically had no friendships in their congregation that would reinforce positive behavior. Almost everyone they know in their congregation attends church every Sunday morning and worships together, but then parties and drinks and goes clubbing the rest of the weekend. Their lifestyles have nothing to do with that hour of worship one day a week. Even more ironic is that this is a conservative, rather legalistic church – not some stereotypically liberal church as you might suspect. So you have this picture of a congregation of Christians and worship leaders who have no integrity in their worship. It's as it says in Isaiah 29:13: ***"These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men."*** This is a very sad scenario, but I don't think it's all that rare. It seems that there's a huge disconnect between the lifestyle of worshippers and worship leaders and the songs they sing.

Recently the Heart of the City Worship Band performed for a local Christian College's Spring Prom alternative event. During the evening there was a fun comedy group there that was on before us. During their show, they asked the students, "What are your two favorite TV shows?" Unanimously, the crowd yelled out "Grey's Anatomy" and "Scrubs". I felt a little sick, but again not surprised, to hear that response. Those two shows are well acted, funny -- and filthy. Everyone sleeps with everyone in a very well-acted, humorous way. Most of the humor is overtly sexual. And in our worldly Christian culture, "funny", "well-acted" and "entertaining" trump all Biblical values – so that we cast aside the Word of God as our guide and embrace the world's values instead.

Way of the Master.com recently gave out these statistics: *"In 2005, roughly \$8.8 billion was spent on movie tickets in the U.S. How much of \$8.8 billion do you think came from those who call themselves Christians? According to The Barna Group, it was a massive \$6.94 billion. Over 70% of the box office intake comes from people of faith."* And so, as we constantly open ourselves up to worldly thinking so much that we laugh at things that grieve the Holy Spirit and sing along with things that are the antithesis of God's ways, we can't help but have our behavior follow suit – all the while standing and singing "How Great is Our God". To this type of worship the Lord says in Amos 5:21-24, ***"I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!"***

God wants integrity in our worship. We put so much time, money and energy into great equipment, sound systems and in being cutting edge in our music. But if we don't have integrity, God hates it. We're wasting our time, money and energy. Let's ask ourselves

the question, are we as willing to put time, energy and money into living lives of integrity so that we can, as Romans 12 says, present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God as an act of worship?

But maybe you're not someone who is immersing yourself in garbage for entertainment, but have nonetheless found yourself struggling with besetting sins and addictions that have caused you not to live in integrity. It seems that everyone I know struggles with something. It might be materialism, overspending and greed. It might be food addictions. It might be alcohol and drug addictions. It might be homosexuality, pornography or sexual addictions. It might be gossip and slander and self-righteousness. Or maybe it's several of those things. Whatever your struggles, are you willing to do what it takes to get your life to a place of integrity?

Several years ago, I got to a place where I realized that, as a man, I couldn't walk in integrity on my own. On several occasions, I found myself in hotel rooms while traveling doing ministry, being hugely tempted by what came on cable TV. I also found myself having a whole alluring world at my fingertips on my personal computer through the internet in my home and office that was never available before and I saw my integrity beginning to crumble. But being a pastor and worship leader and teacher and up-front guy, I was supposed to have it all together. So to talk out loud about it was a difficult decision. But I didn't want to continue to fight this struggle alone. So I joined a men's group, I put an accountability program on my computer and I began meeting weekly with another pastor friend of mine who shared in these struggles. We began to be completely honest with each other and to hold each other accountable and pray for each other so that our lives would be a reflection of our songs and sermons and values. These were embarrassing, frightening, humbling, vulnerable and intimidating steps to make. But I wanted and want, at all costs, to have my life be a life of integrity so that my worship would be true and pleasing to the Lord. It has been one of the most rewarding choices that both of us have ever made in our lives.

Let me ask you, are you willing to do what it takes to have integrity in your worship? God's not interested in anything less. If you're entertaining yourself with things that grieve the Lord, I want to challenge you to read Ephesians chapter 5 and repent of the choices you've made and change your habits. Let the Word of God and the Spirit of God direct your choices instead of the evil world around you. I also recommend that every Christian finds at least one other Christian that they can meet regularly with to confess with, pray with and hold each other accountable. And if you are someone who has struggled specifically like I have, I highly recommend an internet accountability program called "Covenant Eyes" [www.covenanteyes.com](http://www.covenanteyes.com), as well as a ministry called "The Purity Coalition" that has been transforming thousands of men's lives and marriages. [www.puritycoalition.org](http://www.puritycoalition.org)

Let's be worshippers with more than our songs, and then watch the Holy Spirit be poured out in our congregations and the fruit of the Spirit be manifest in all that we do.