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GET YOUR HEAD IN THE GAME!

Lanny Smith

The title of this article is a sports metaphor, which essentially means, *"You need to fully focus on the task at hand, and stop being distracted."* I chose that title to address an issue which I, quite honestly, have mixed feelings about. The issue is: *What is the appropriate length of a period of worship?* The reason I have mixed feelings is that I have heard some sermons that were too long; in fact, I have preached a few of them myself! On the other hand, there is definitely something wrong with putting the Lord's work on a "timer." So, I have mixed feelings about this matter, because I can see both sides of this argument. But I do think there is a critical issue at play here, and I think it needs to be addressed.

I shall begin by asking a series of questions; and I want you to find a "book, chapter, and verse" answer to these questions: 1) How long should the entire Sunday morning worship period be? 2) How many songs should be sung? 3) How many verses in each song? 4) Should we sing fast or slow? 5) How long should we pray? 6) How many prayers should we have? 7) How long should the remarks be at the Lord's table? 8) How long should the remarks be regarding the contribution? 9) Can we pray before the contribution? 10) How long should a sermon be?

It should be obvious that there are no Biblical answers to these questions. The reason there is no Biblical answer is because these are not Biblical issues. *And that means the only reason such things become an issue is because WE choose to make them an issue!* If I'm wrong, I would love to see your Scriptures that answer the above questions.

While you are "searching the Scriptures" for an answer, allow me to give you a few Scriptures of my own. When Ezra gathered the children of Israel together to teach them the Bible, *"he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law"* (Neh.8:3). *"Now it came to pass in those days that He (Jesus) went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God"* (Lk.6:12). *"Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight."* There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together. And in a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep. He was overcome by sleep; *and as Paul continued speaking,* he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. But Paul went down, fell on him, and embracing him said, 'Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him.' Now when he had come up, had broken bread and eaten, *and talked a long while, even till daybreak,* he departed" (Ac.20:7-11). In these examples, one worship period lasted half a day; and the other two were "all-nighters!"

Brethren, listen to me: When you set your stop watch the minute someone gets up to talk about the Lord's Supper, or preach a sermon, YOUR HEAD IS NOT IN THE GAME! You may not realize it, but the perception you create is that you just want to "get the game over with," so you can move on to the rest of your day. *Do you really want to face the Lord with a "get it over with" attitude about worship?* In keeping with my sports metaphor, a few "extra innings" every so often won't hurt us; in fact, it might do us some good – *if we have our heads in the game!* It's not as though we play "extra innings" every week; but sometimes, we do. And you know what? You'll be okay! If a little "overtime" is your biggest problem in life, then your life is good!

Before I close, I want you to think about some areas where no one seems to mind the time factor. No one seems to mind sitting for two or three hours for a ball-game, movie, or concert. Some people can shop all day long, travelling from one store to another; and standing in long lines to pay for their stuff. People can get in a car and drive all day long just to reach their destination; and not a peep is made about the time involved. Why is that? *Because their head is in the game!*

Yes, some people talk too long (“Lord, is it I?”). So, I am not advocating for longer services; I am just advocating for Christians to get their heads in the game!

Building My Case by Comparing to the Least

- by Greg Gwin

Self-justification is a highly developed skill in most individuals. In school, on the job, in our marriages, and in almost every other activity and relationship we will quickly revert to self-justification if some criticism is leveled in our direction. When it comes to our spiritual service to God we also rush to defend ourselves if it is suggested that we are negligent and need to improve in one area or another.

The example of King Saul stands out among those who made excuses for their failures. When confronted by Samuel upon his return from fighting the Amalekites, Saul tried to blame “the people” for taking forbidden spoil, and rationalized that it was acceptable because the things taken would be used for sacrifices (1 Samuel 15:20,21). Samuel, of course, did not agree (vs. 22,23).

One of the classic methods frequently employed in the art of self-justification is to compare oneself to someone who is viewed as ‘worse.’ ‘I may not attend services as regularly as I should, but I’m present more often than bro. Soandso.’ Or, ‘I may have a bad temper and I often display it, but I recently heard one of the other members burst out in rage, and he even used curse words.’ Or, ‘I may not give much to the church, but I’ve watched what some of the people around me put in the plate, and I’m giving more than they are.’ . . . and the examples could be multiplied.

The inspired apostle Paul destroyed forever the work of these ‘self-justifiers’ when he said: “We dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise” (2 Corinthians 10:12). Learn the lesson. A right standing with God is not determined by finding someone ‘worse’ than you are. Anybody can do that! Think!