

Some Reflections On The 2011 Florida College Chorus Tour

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I recently received an email from Ralph Walker on behalf of Florida College, announcing the 2011 performance schedule for the FC Chorus. The introductory paragraph says:

“The Florida College Chorus is performing the last part of a three-year project on the life of Christ. This year, director Jon Bassett has arranged songs, narrations, and scripture readings focusing on the death and resurrection of Jesus. Please feel free to share this with others who might have interest in hearing this program. All presentations are free. CDs of the previous recordings (The Birth and The Life) will be available for sale, as well as pre-orders of this year’s program.”

I usually pay little attention to the practices of Florida College, so I did not realize that this type of thing was being done. I just happened to read this particular announcement and some things got my attention. There are several things wrong with what Florida College is doing in these chorus performances:

1. Florida College turns gospel teaching and singing into a “performance.” The word “performing” is their word, not mine. Sadly, brethren are completely ignoring the teaching of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. These passages provide certain guidelines for the singing of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Those who wish to use the things of God should do so in the way that God has prescribed.

Brethren are typically affected by two conditions with regard to singing: the *number* of singers and the *talent* of the singers. I have heard many people describe how “uplifted” they were by “so many voices blending together in song.” By this standard, the singing of only a few would be quite depressing. We should remember that it was just Paul and Silas singing in that prison cell at Philippi, yet God was impressed with their singing (Acts 16:25, 26).

In the same way that some brethren are carried away by the number of singers, others are carried away by the flawless performance of trained, selected voices and the purely esthetic qualities of the renditions. Such “performing” is no less entertainment than what the sectarian gets out of the performances where he is a member. God is not impressed with academic prowess in music. Merchandise-oriented brethren know how to appeal to the general brotherhood’s love for gospel singing, and they

use it to sell their merchandise. Along with being unscriptural, the practice is simply disgusting.

2. Florida College is commercializing the gospel of Christ. This “performing” [again, their word, not mine] of “*songs, narrations, and scripture readings*” is one of the services that Florida College provides in an effort to introduce and attract people to their school. FC has always claimed to provide a “spiritual atmosphere” for its students. We now see it using spiritual *performances* as a means of promoting the school. Gospel teaching and singing are used as an advertisement program for the promotion of a human institution. I realize that choruses sometimes perform non-spiritual songs. However, as seen from the above quotation, this particular performance uses songs, narrations and Scripture readings “*focusing on the death and resurrection of Jesus.*” By definition, songs about the death and resurrection of Jesus are *spiritual songs*. Thus, the Florida College chorus is “performing” *spiritual songs, narrations and Scripture readings* as a means of attracting business and making money. This is a misuse of an act of worship and the denigration of the gospel of Christ.

As stated in the Florida College mailer, these *performances* “focusing on the death and resurrection of Christ” are being recorded and sold at the Florida College Bookstore. Prior performances focused upon the birth and life of Christ (<http://bookstore.floridacollege.edu/store/product/48306/FC-CHORUS-09-10-GREATEST-STORY/>). So, along with their use as a promotion of the college, the gospel themed performances of *songs, narrations and Scripture readings* are also being sold commercially. The sale of these recordings is strictly and solely a business and money-making operation. Is that what praise to God is all about? Interestingly, people will purchase these CDs and will *listen to other people* sing songs in honor and praise of God. I will address this practice later in the article.

For some years I have been warning brethren against the commercialization of the gospel. Businesses such as Truth Bookstore and Florida College conduct their Bible Lectureships only in places where they have *book stores*. Florida College conducts its lectureships in a way that showcases its campus and advertises its educational services. Businesses such as Florida College and Truth Magazine use gospel sermons and singing in order to attract people to the places where they sell their products and services. While there is nothing unscriptural about such organizations selling teaching materials, it is unscriptural for

them to function as *evangelistic* and *worship* organizations. A simple reading of the New Testament quickly reveals that the *local church* is the evangelistic organization of God's specification (1 Thess. 1:1, 8; Eph. 4:12-16; Acts 13:1-3; 1 Tim. 3:15).

3. Florida College ignores New Testament rules regarding "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs." Upon what logical or scriptural basis can Florida College object to church choirs? Some claim that Ephesians 5:19 is confined by church building walls. However, no such limitation is placed by the context. Paul teaches that the singing of *psalms, hymns and spiritual songs* should be spoken "to one another." We teach one another in the singing of these songs (Col. 3:16). If the Florida College chorus is authorized to sing songs "focusing on the death and resurrection of Jesus," while spectators sit and listen to their performance, then why can't choirs perform such songs during church services while spectators sit and listen? What passage regulates the practice of the one and not the other?

Supporters say that the chorus performance does not constitute worship. I agree, provided that they are singing non-spiritual songs. However, songs focusing on the *birth, life, death and resurrection* of Jesus are indeed *spiritual* songs! Singing such songs for the purpose of entertainment [or commerce] constitutes a profaning of holy things, and takes God's name in vain. By singing *psalms, hymns and spiritual songs* one obligates himself to the rules that have been divinely attached to their use. The Hebrew writer said, "Through Him then let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips that acknowledge His name" (Heb. 13:15). The *fruit of the lips*, offered either by spiritual song or gospel instruction, constitutes "praise to God," and must not be practiced for other reasons.

Conclusion

Some businesses may consider their services to be so "spiritually" valuable that they exempt themselves from certain biblical rules and principles. They can reach a point where they consider their function to be indispensable to the welfare of the brotherhood. The reality is that they can reach a point where they do far more harm than good. We call upon such institutions to remember their place. Let the college be the college, the book store be the book store, and let local churches do the work that God assigned them to do.

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