

A PREZ RELEASE **from AGTS**

(Monthly commentary from the President of the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary)

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Can You Hear Me Now?

New technology inevitably creates issues for which previously established procedures are inadequate. Just a small slice of the technology revolution is the cell phone. USA Today has reported that 1/3 of the American public views talking on the cell phone in public as the apex of rude behavior. At times it is humorous: like watching people walk down the street seemingly talking to themselves. At times it is down right annoying: like the multiple ringer options that create a cacophony of noise sounding like the meeting of countless species of birds and animals in a Brazilian rain forest.

I cringe every time a pager or cell phone goes off in a church service. Call me old-fashioned – tell me I'm a hold-over from the 20th century that hasn't yet realized that instant communication is an inalienable right, (you'd be right.) Special announcements and power point requests previous to church services seemingly have minimal impact, but I am determined to get God on my side on this score. The issue has become more than mere annoyance; it is increasingly a question of who gets the attention in a church service: Verizon or God?

Pagers and phones going off in a church service is not merely about noise. I've preached in countless services where screaming children and coughing saints caused my voice to project itself at decibels akin to a Boeing 747 taking off a runway. The real issue centers in why we congregate to worship God and what attitude should accompany that event?

The Old Testament concept of Sabbath and its relation to Christian worship has passed off the Christian horizon in much the same manner as blue laws, closing businesses on Sundays, have become ancient history. The Old Testament indicates that God rested from His work of creation on the 7th day (Gen. 2:1-2). The people of God in the Old Testament recognized the 7th day of the week as a day of rest (Exodus 16:23-26). The Sabbath was related to time and actually was a symbol of sacred time and a future that would reflect the culmination of God's design.

The author of Hebrews developed the concept of Sabbath and rest in Hebrews 4:1-11. Three "rests" are seen described in this passage: the rest after creation, the rest that Israel sought in the Promised Land and the rest that is in Jesus Christ. Simply put, Sabbath has to do with God's redemptive plan that takes place in space and time, but supercedes all the limitations of a 24/7 understanding of time.

While the idea of Sabbath, like temple worship has passed off the scene, the essence of what the Sabbath represents is now observed in regular meetings of God's people. Because we are in Christ we can "rest" from our striving to live life on our own terms. Such human effort

has been shown by Christ's death and resurrection to be inadequate. Our hope is found in the fact that God's grace has supplied what human effort could never approximate (Eph. 2:8-9).

Pagers and cell phones interrupting church services is not about annoyance. It's about an intrusion into a sacred recognition that chronological (24/7) time no longer rules our lives. Our Redeemer God has given us a relationship through His son Jesus Christ that connects us with eternity, in the middle of our present existence. To enter into a time and place where our sole purpose should be to give God space and then allow intrusions from phones and pagers is essentially demonstrating that we will accept a relationship with God only on our personally defined terms.

When a meeting of God's people is focused on the redemptive work of Jesus Christ that links us to an eternal sense of destiny and we allow intrusions by a symbol of a world that is time-limited: like Esau of old, we exchange our birthright for a bowl of lentil soup. Such an exchange is self-defeating!

I feel better now – I've got something that's been bugging me out in the open so the Word of God could speak to it clearly. When we come together as God's people we enter into sacred space. Clutter should be kept at a minimum. It's a place where human clutter that's kept to a minimum allows God to speak and say: **Can you hear me now? GOOD!**

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Reference: Robert E. Webber, *Worship-Old and New*, Zondervan Publishing.

Put on your calendar if you live on the East Coast.

November 18-19, 2002, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Earn graduate credit at the *Leadership Roundtable: Ministry on the Edge: The Mission to Post-Christian America*, with Brian McLaren. For information and registration visit our website: www.agts.edu or call 1-800-467-AGTS and ask for Randy Walls.

P.S.S. I would also highly recommend your consideration of the Leadership Conference being sponsored by Timberline Church in Ft. Collins, CO November 3-5, 2002. This dynamic congregation is launching this conference offering as a way of networking with the goal of providing inspiration and resources for high-impact leadership. I hope to meet you there. Register at www.timberlinechurch.org.