

Lion Dance and the Christian Faith—Compatible?

Introduction – We live in a multi-racial society. God knew that when He called Gentiles into the kingdom of God. When God replaced the nation of Israel with the local church as His witnesses because Israel rejected the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, God already knew about Singapore and other cosmopolitan nations. God’s children will come from heathenistic backgrounds with cultures that stem from their idolatrous worship. This is clearly seen in the epistles of the New Testament. Corinth, Ephesus, Thessalonica and most of all Rome were all major Grecian/Roman cities with a long history of idolatry. Yet they were all used by God to be God’s witnesses to bring the gospel of Christ to the rest of the world. They had problems and the New Testament was written by God to instruct these churches on how they ought to conduct themselves as God’s witnesses, showing to the world the great impact that salvation brings to them within their respective cultures.

Christians in Africa, Australia, America, Europe, Japan, China and Korea, etc will have their cultural distinctives. God did not give to the Gentile churches a one-size-fits-all model for witness. They must all bear a holy and godly testimony as they all share the gospel that must be based entirely upon the Holy Scriptures. The complete biblical essence of the gospel message must be found in all the different cultural approaches to witnessing for Christ. This was a non-negotiable requirement from God to all. The gospel must not be tempered with, for there are grave consequences to anyone who preaches another gospel that is not based upon the Bible, to deceive sinners who hear and receive this distorted gospel. Paul made this very clear in *Galatians 1:8-9 (KJV)*, “*But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. 9 As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.*”

Therefore, the holy witness of the gospel bearer is of utmost importance in demonstrating the power and reality of the gospel of Christ. The need for a holy witness includes the individual believer as well as the local Christian church as long as the name of Christ is identified. Thus it was an “eye opener” for me to hear the loud beating of drums accompanied by other musical instruments playing a Chinese New Year tune and to see kindergarten children prancing around with miniature sized lion headgear. Their kindergarten teachers were teaching them the lion dance. One of the teachers was beating the drum and another had a mask on, holding a fan and jumping around trying to entice the “lions”. There is nothing wrong with this, except that this was done inside the church and it is a Christian kindergarten!

What is the origin and significance of the lion dance?

Suchittra Vasu wrote, “The Lion Dance is a pugilistic performance dating back to more than 1,500 years. Its performance during auspicious occasions such as the launch of new buildings, offices and shops is believed to bring good fortune and wealth. The Lion Dance is also performed during the Chinese New Year because of its association with the legendary stories of a bestial creature, the Nien, being frightened off by villagers banging on loud drums on the eve of Chinese New Year. The lion is regarded by Chinese communities outside China as a creature representing good omen. However, the legend of Nien began with the lion as a monstrous creature. According to legend, every Chinese New Year’s eve, an unknown animal came to destroy the fields, crops and animals belonging to the farmers of the village. They could not identify the beast and named it *nien* which came to mean “year” in Chinese. To put a stop to the ravaging, the villagers made a fearful model of the animal out of bamboo and paper, with two men manipulating it, accompanied by the loud beating of instruments. They waited for the animal on New Year’s eve and succeeded in driving away the Nien. Henceforth, the Nien dance was performed annually on Chinese New Year’s eve with drums, cymbals and gongs. Over time, the image of the animal came to look more like a lion and the dance was later regarded as auspicious for all significant occasions.” [Taken from Singapore Infopedia - An electronic encyclopaedia on Singapore’s history, culture, people and events - http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_57_2004-12-27.html] [emphasis added]

What does the Bible say about the Christian’s participation of such “cultural” activities like the lion dance?

I. “Unto the LORD” Principle – As mentioned above, Gentile believers are not commanded by God to relinquish all their cultures and behave as if they don’t have any as they witness for Christ. They are allowed by God to retain their cultures as long as they observe their cultures as “unto the Lord.” This is clearly taught by God in *Romans 14:7-8 (KJV)*, “*For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. 8 For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s.*” [emphasis added] All believers are subject to this biblical principle given by God in Romans 14:7 and 8. There is no exception. This is what salvation brings. Anyone who continues to live his/her own life controlled by self-will need to check his/her salvation. No one who is born again in Christ should live to himself. The power of the gospel transforms the life of the person from within. This transformation begins with a new mind by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. There ought to be a desire to study the Word of God which is the milk to his hungry soul, which he did not have before as a sinner dead in sin. With the knowledge of the Word of God in Him, he will want to live unto Christ correctly. First the desire, then the knowledge to live rightly. Without the knowledge, the desire alone is not enough to help him live a holy life unto Christ.

He will also not “die unto himself” which means that as he lives daily he also dies daily. How he spends his life is also how he spends his death. The passing of a day is one day lesser for the believer to serve the Lord and live for Him. He should not be

living for the things of this world to please himself and he will not sacrifice things to suit himself. He lives or dies because of the LORD! The Lord is the only one in his life whom he must please. He must promote the Lord in all he does. He will indulge in any pleasure in his life that does not bring glory to God. The reason is that he belongs to the Lord. He became the Lord's when he was redeemed by Christ's blood. The Lord is Christ! When he accepts Christ as his personal Lord and Saviour, there is a change in ownership. Sin was his master before salvation; Christ is his new Master after salvation. Therefore, he is duty bound as a slave to live only according to the desires and pleasure of his new Master, Jesus Christ. The desires and will of Christ are found in the perfect Bible. The believer must now regulate all the things in his life to be "unto the Lord", which means according to the teaching of God's Word.

The Word of God teaches all believers that there is only one living and true God and there is none other. "Bringing good fortune and wealth" into the believer's life is not from prancing lions but only through the one living and true God. In fact, God says to every believer that he must no longer serve mammon and no longer seek after health and wealth! Jesus taught this very clearly in His Sermon on the Mount. To teach against serving mammon, Jesus says in **Matthew 6:24 (KJV)**, "*No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*" Jesus teaches believers to not seek after wealth and health on this earth in **Matthew 6:31-34 (KJV)**, "*Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? 32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. 33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. 34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*" The teaching to all believers is to focus on all things eternal and spiritual. Even as they live on this earth all things must be done "unto the Lord" so that by their lives, their family and friends will see Christ in them and will want to believe in Christ. Prancing around as lions will never accomplish that. Instead, it compromises the believer's witness for Christ!

II. "The Glory of God" Principle – All things must be done to the glory of God. If it is not to God's glory, then it will be to man's glory. If it is to man's glory, then it is a sin. The reason is that all believers have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. It is their duty, out of gratitude and love for Christ, to live only for God's glory. There is no other way to live. The Bible teaches this clearly in **1 Corinthians 10:31-33 (KJV)**, "*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. 32 Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: 33 Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.*" [emphasis added] When the believer's life glorifies God, he is not in sin. He points others to the great work of salvation that God has brought into his life. When he glorifies self or others, he detracts from the high calling of God, which is to promote Christ, by pointing others away from Christ to man who cannot save. Only the Name of Christ can save a person from sin, death and hell. What can give the believer who lives on this earth the greatest joy and purpose than knowing that his life in Christ can help another person out of sin, death and hell! Why wouldn't any truly born again believer want to do this? Why would he, instead, deliberately live in sin and point others away from Christ, unless he is not a true believer?!

That is why Paul adds by saying that the believer will glorify God by giving "none offence." The phrase "none offence" means "not leading into sin." Every believer is duty bound by God to never deliberately lead anyone into sin because of the salvific work that has been done in his life. A forgiving and loving heart and a life of holiness will surely accomplish this. God will be glorified when believers live lives that are in accordance with God's perfect truth. What an amazing and wonderful way to live. The target audience of giving none offence includes the Jews, the Gentiles and the church of God. This covers everyone on this earth! The Jews were the people of God who rejected Christ and the Gentiles refer to the rest of the world who have not heard of Christ. The church of God refers to all those who are in the same church with the believer! The believer, for Christ's sake, must never offend and stumble anyone knowingly. Therefore Paul concludes by saying that he would do everything in his power, including never to please himself or to seek his own benefit, to ensure that others might be saved by Christ. If the believer lives a holy life and the glory of God is seen in his life, sinners will see the power of the gospel and the reality of Christ as the Son of God who came to save the world from sin!

When believers prance around in a lion dance costume, it is not glorifying to God. When a Christian Kindergarten teaches their children to do that, it is worse. These are young children who do not know better. Christ warns in **Matthew 18:5-6 (KJV)**, "*And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. 6 But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.*" [emphasis added] The children are sent by their parents, many of them being Christians, to a Christian Kindergarten to be taught the Word of God and to learn to be a godly witness for Christ. The souls of these little ones are at stake. How could these "Christian" teachers not see the harm they are doing to the minds and hearts of these little ones who believe everything that is taught to them, and yet expect God not to see and punish? This is beyond comprehension!

Are the Christian parents of these children guiltless? How can they be! They ought to bear the bulk of the blame because these are their children whom God has entrusted to them to bring up in the fear and admonition of the Lord. It is their duty to ensure safety and protect their children's defenceless young minds and hearts from deceptive teachings and practices! These children will probably grow up believing that lion dancing with all its accompanying superstitions is acceptable to believers! The main culprit in the Christian home has to be the father who is the head of his home. As the spiritual head, he is to protect the spiritual

well-being of his whole family, especially the young ones! **Ephesians 6:4 (KJV)**, “*And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*” He fails God and his children when he allows them to be poisoned by falsehood at that tender age. I appeal to all parents to do what is right according to Holy Scriptures to the glory of God by protecting your children, for Christ’s sake!

Conclusion – All believers live and witness within their respective cultures. God knew that very well when He replaced the national witness of Israel with the local church witness all over the world. However, God has taught all Gentile believers to practise their respective cultures as unto the Lord, i.e. according to the teachings of God’s Word. These must be done to the glory of God in order to give none offence so that many might be saved, especially their own children. The lion dance has not lost its superstitious flavour. It is not biblical for believers to prance around doing the lion dance, least of all for a Christian Kindergarten, sanctioned by a Christian church, to teach the children the lion dance with the teachers beating the drum. The Christian parents are not blameless for placing their children into such “Christian” kindergartens! Protect your children from these serious spiritual errors. The father is the head of his home. He bears the greatest blame when his children are stumbled, thinking that it is all right to believe in superstition and to chase away bad luck so that they can have “good fortune and wealth” when the Word of God commands all believers to seek first God’s kingdom and His righteousness! The lion dance and the Christian faith are not compatible. Christian Kindergartens that teach this commit sin. Anyone who stumbles the little ones brings shame to the Name of Christ and is not guiltless in the sight of the all knowing God!