

Is Technology killing the church?

Is Technology a contributing factor in the decline of church attendance?

By L Slater 2023 ©

Part 1

Since the advent of digital technology, it was hoped that church sound would improve in the worship space. You would think that better sound would mean higher church attendance. Instead, overall church sound for Christian Worship in all denominations has continued to worsen. In a way, technology is killing the church and Christians are letting it happen. The decline in church sound has pushed many churches into an entertainment style of worship in the hope, of slowing down the drop in overall church attendance. The entertainment style of worship has turned services into a spectator event rather than a participation experience, which is what worship is supposed to be.

When tested, the overall speech quality in most churches is a low-level passing grade, and many more houses of worship fail a basic computerized speech test. Music quality in most churches come up short as well, even when the musical talent is entertaining enough. No matter what song leaders do, getting the audience to engage in congregational singing seems like a fruitless effort.

For many churches, the live worship service falls very short of expectations. It fails to compete with YouTube quality broadcasts. As a result, there is often no compelling reason for a person to attend a worship service that does not engage the person while attending. Congregational singing is the single most compelling reason for people to attend a worship service, second only to the preaching of the Gospel. Fellowship is another reason for Christians to meet, but fellowship is not part of the worship service. However, it does get people to church if they like the people they meet.

It is no secret that many pastors and worship leaders lament how the audience fails to participate during congregational singing. It's not that the people don't want to sing; they do. Instead, it is because the room cannot support congregational singing, no matter what technology is used. Churches seem blind to this fact. Instead of turning to the Bible to fix the worship space, for the past 30 years, churches have been chasing after better leadership, better talent, and the ubiquitous endless and bottomless money pit march in the pursuit of better technology. This three-prong effort has failed to get people engaged in honest worship, and the decline in church

attendance continues to spiral down. What is needed is a God-given solution to a man-made problem.

For many individuals, the church is nothing more than a YouTube video watched for self-gratification or listened to while doing something else. There is no engagement, no participation, and no opportunity to share in a learned experience. For some, hearing the Gospel is enough. For most people, learning is an experience, and for many more, a group activity. Home Bible studies have some success, but that is often discouraged if the home study group becomes more successful than anything done at the church building.

One of the driving forces in the spiraling decay in church attendance has been acoustics. The acoustical condition of the worship space either engages people to participate or it doesn't. The acoustical condition of a worship space affects every part of worship, regardless of the level of technology applied.

The acoustics issue has plagued the church community since the days of the Roman Emperor Constantine, and when he allowed the Christians to hold public worship. Since then, acoustics has helped to contribute to and define worship in many ways. The progression of dealing with acoustics in secular terms has brought us the Gregorian Chants, the boys' choir, the high pulpit, the song leader, the music director, contemporary worship, praise and worship teams, the drum booth, to finally, worship-tainment. For centuries, the church has been unable to figure out the acoustics problem, or they have ignored it, hoping it would go away or resolve itself. That plan has no opportunity for success.

These days, churches that are growing are doing so in spite of the awful acoustical conditions most Christians are subjected to every week. Growing churches are either part of a grass-roots movement of returning to basic gospel teaching, or the church is pastor led with entertaining sermons and a robust entertainment program. Churches that have a weak message or are following the social justice movements, continue to decline as the novelty of the messages becomes old. People will leave churches that don't meet their needs, and they will eventually attend one of the other churches or stop attending church altogether.

When the acoustics of a worship space discourages congregational singing, the whole worship experience is

reduced to a spectator sport. As a spectator sport (*and worship should not be a spectator sport*.) watching the program on a screen or as an audiobook, becomes impersonal. For Christians to grow, they need the contact of others. In a church that preaches a strong gospel message, relationships tend to be long-term. In churches that are pastor-led, relationships tend to be short-term.

The acoustics issue does shape church worship today, and over the years, many churches have tried to address sound in one way or another. There have been thousands of attempts to do one simple task - how to improve congregational singing. Every attempt fails. However, there is a solution. The source of that solution comes from the Bible. The Bible has always had the solution, but man keeps insisting that there is a better way, apart from the Bible.

The secular community doesn't have a clue in how to improve congregational singing. They know reverberation time, and how to kill a room, but to make a room that supports congregational singing, that feature eludes them at every step. All of the secular methods of managing sound are purely from an entertainment point of view. They argue that if you brighten up a room, you make it too reverberant for speech. If you dampen the room, you kill congregational singing, but all of the stage entertainment can be amplified to various levels of quality. The notion of having a room that meets the needs of the congregation and for the preaching of the Gospel at the same time is totally foreign to the secular community. The same people who can dial in a great concert hall or recording studio have nothing to offer the church community. And it is not from a lack of trying.

The problem is, the secular community has only two tools in its toolbox, absorption and diffusion. Their approach is much the same as how sound systems are designed, by using the point-and-shoot method. After that, they use the firefighting method and just put out the hotspots as they show up. Nowhere in secular literature or journals do they offer an acoustical plan or system for concert halls, sound stages, or studio acoustics. Such a plan doesn't exist.

The church needs an acoustical plan or system that meets all of its needs for worship, regardless of the style of worship a church follows. Is such a system possible for churches? The answer is in the 11th book of the Bible and in the detailed description of Solomon's Temple. The details of the room, the dimensions, building materials, wall carvings, the veil, and the windows describe the perfect worship space for Christian worship. These details were written and preserved for us over 3000 years ago, and until recently, were thought of as just an ornate monument to God. However, we must not ignore the fact that God designed the Temple through Jesus Christ, in the

past, for the present, and future. When you try to answer the question why did God design the Temple in the first place, it becomes easier to see how He gave us a gift that gives forever.

The first gift is Jesus dying on the Cross as a living sacrifice to atone for our sins, so we can live forever with Him. The next gift is when Jesus, in the Old Testament, designed His Followers the perfect worship space wherever Christians are free to build houses of worship to worship Him in. For centuries, churches have designed and built structures that look like monuments to God. Not as a house of God. Almost as if the church building is to be worshiped. That would be a violation of the second commandment. Instead, we should be building what God designed for us so that we can better worship HIM and be a stronger community of believers. We are strengthened by the Word of God, not by the man-centered building we call houses of worship. Isn't it Interesting that Jesus called the Temple He chased the money changers from, a "house of prayer." Let that sink in for a moment.

Part 2

How does acoustics affect how the brain works?

There is the age-old question, what came first, the chicken or the egg? For many, this is an impossible statement to get a consensus on. Likewise, here is a similar statement. Does music re-enforce speech, or does speech re-enforce music?

The question comes about because when you study church history, for over 300 years, protestant churches practiced worship where the services started with the reading of the scriptures, then the sermon, and the church service would end with music. In the 1800s, Charles Finny changed the order of worship following a commercial business model, creating a new religion within the Christian community that hijacked the church as described throughout the Bible.

This is where church acoustics permitted this change to happen. In the Biblical model of room acoustics, the room is designed to support congregational singing, (*which is defined as a room where 65% of the audience sings every song without the need of being led by musical instruments or excessive prompting*.) which gets the people to engage and to participate in the whole worship service. In this model, music is used to re-enforce the spoken Word. Music is used to help us to remember what was spoken. Therefore, it is Biblical for music to end worship; Not start the worship.

When a worship space can not support proper congregational singing, as when less than 50% of the audience is engaged, (*often it is closer to 20-30% of the audience is singing*.) the

music becomes the message when it is choreographed and scripted. This seems counterintuitive, but by forcing people to be engaged in an activity that does not seem natural, it tires people out. When people are fatigued, they are more likely to not react to poor preaching, poor messages, or wrong teaching. When the acoustics of a church is poor, music is used to manipulate people and it prepares them to accept false interpretations of the Bible. By getting people to engage with entertainment before the message, a false teacher can get away with deceptive teaching.

In following the Biblical model of a worship space, music is used to re-enforce the spoken Word. Therefore, music is supposed to follow the reading of the scriptures and the sermon. There is no example of music coming before the spoken word of God in the Bible.

In the business/secular model of hype and self-promotion, - which has become the model followed by evangelical and charismatic churches, - music is used to hype up the presenter and the presenter uses the music to re-enforce what they are selling. The secular way of conducting a meeting is to use music to get people to buy what they are selling. At the same time, for many churches, music takes up more time than the sermon. Again, this is a secular tactic for selling products.

In the Biblical Model of a house of worship, the sound quality keeps the people alert and engaged in the whole worship. There is no room for someone to introduce a watered-down message and false teaching. The brain works best when it is relaxed and alert.

In the non-biblical model of a house of worship, nothing works properly together. Either the room is great for speech but poor for music or good for music and poor for speech. The two functions are never in harmony together.

Music is a great manipulator of people's emotions. People may not be singing, but they will tap their toes or their fingers to the music. Getting people to sway to the music, raising their hands in the air, and gyrating to the music doesn't require people to think, it only needs to get them to feel better about themselves. Music gets people to focus on self. When the sermon that follows is about self, the person walks away feeling good, but learns nothing. Many people come to church with nothing and leave with nothing, but they were well entertained. How is that any different that going to a nightclub and dancing the night away.

In a church that follows the biblical acoustic plan, a person comes to church expecting to learn more about God and how to go out into the world and to be a light in the world. It is the hope that every time you go to church, you come out a stronger person, and more grounded in your beliefs. That is the hope.

It may not happen every time, but that is the goal. Acoustics help to support the Word of God and every part of the worship service. Good acoustics help people to remember more of what was spoken as well as help people to better understand what was spoken.

Since the Bible is the source for proper worship space acoustics, why are churches being so slow to upgrade their worship spaces to meet those demands?

For the record, there are over 400 churches that have already made this leap of faith. On average, where the church has had no change in leadership after the acoustics were upgraded, these churches experienced an attendance increase of 10 to 20%, a year after the improvement. The Biblical upgrade doesn't cost much. It is affordable for any house of God. Why are so many churches walking away from an increase of 10% in attendance and tithes and offerings?

For some inner-city churches, the acoustical improvement was so good that they were able to hold regular fund-raising concerts and events as a secondary source of income. This modest investment in Biblical acoustics is keeping the doors open of some churches as of when this article was written.

Good acoustics shouldn't be rare or limited to wealthy and local landmarks. When following the Biblical plan, any church can become a full-performance worship space, as is required for basic Christian worship. Churches have their own unique acoustical needs. The secular community has had centuries to solve this problem and they still have no solution. The Bible has a solution. What are you waiting for!