

“Quiz Time for Der Antwort Mann”

Dear Antwort Mann,

I grew up in a very conservative, Lutheran congregation, so these questions may seem weird to you. In my present congregation, I see and hear things in church that would never have been permitted in my old one. So here's a little test to see what you say, okay?

1. Is it okay to chew gum in church, then stick it under the pew before going up for communion? (My old church would never have allowed gum chewing in God's house).
2. If our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, is it okay to get a tattoo or body piercing? (I was taught that Christians don't do these things).
3. Is it okay to wear anything I want to church? (My old church had a dress code that people followed).
4. Is it okay for men to sing loudly in church? (My old church had a man that sang well and would lead the church in song).

So, what's the answer, Antwort Mann?

Signed,
“Weird,”

Dear “(Yes, You Are Very) Weird,”

The answers to your questions are: Yes/No; Yes/But; No; Yes. Thanks for asking. Oh, but I guess you would like an explanation for my answers. As it is very likely that your old congregation has its roots in the pietistic/legalistic movement, which tends to judge along human opinions of “Christian behavior” rather than the freedom Christians have in Christ, my answers may be somewhat surprising but, Here Goes!

1. Scripture does not forbid (or even discuss) gum chewing or eating in church (unless you count The Lord's Supper), so you can't say it's not Christian to do that. The 7th Commandment does forbid stealing or damaging the property of others, so sticking gum under pews for others to clean up, or in hymnals or Bibles, thereby destroying them, is wrong. Thus #1 is a Yes/No.
2. When the Scripture speaks about the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:18-20), it warns us against sinning sexually with our bodies, but not, necessarily, with issues like smoking, drinking, tattoos, piercings, etc (These are all pietistic/legalistic applications of this verse). The Old Testament prohibition against tattooing was in relation to pagan practices honoring or worshipping the dead, demons, etc. Obviously, Christians should not engage in those practices if it is for those reasons (1st Commandment issues). But, generally, getting tattoos or piercings (would you prohibit your wife, girlfriend or daughter from having her earlobes pierced for her earrings?) fall under the category of Christian Freedom. But with freedom comes the responsibility to choose wisely what you do so as to not needlessly cause offense or undermine your witness of Christ. As St. Paul writes in 1 Cor. 10:23: “All things are permissible for me; but not all things are helpful.” The tattoos or piercings you get may not be sin, but they could be just plain unwise. Thus, the answer to #2 is “Yes/But.”
3. The Bible talks about dressing “modestly,” that is, with propriety. But that term is fluid, depending upon the setting. The point isn't whether or not a Christian wears a suit to church, or blue jeans and shorts. It is whether a person dresses in a sexual, vulgar, flashy or, otherwise, offensive manner in order to draw attention to oneself, or make others feel uncomfortable. Modestly means dressing in a way that is, as much as possible, in keeping with the norms of a particular congregation. Thus, the answer to #3 is “No.”
4. Hopefully, men and women alike would gladly and enthusiastically sing the hymns and liturgies of the church. There is nothing “unmanly” about singing. Some people are uncomfortable with their ability to sing, or simply lack the voice for it. They should not be looked down on for that reason. But men shouldn't feel like singing is beneath them, either. Look how many men sing in the field

of entertainment (and make boat-loads of money doing it!). Why not, then, in church? So the answer here in #4 is "Yes."

Congregations have every right to establish traditions and practices (rules) for decency and good order, but they have no right to judge the "Christianity" of someone else according to those rules. Individuals, on the other hand, need to be concerned about others, so as to not unnecessarily offend them or cause them to stumble in their faith. So, while I may be free in Christ to wear tattered or casual clothing, chew gum, get tattoos or piercings, etc., if by doing so I am bringing harm to others, then I might want to rethink how I exercise my freedom.

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law." Romans 13:9-10

Best regards,

Der Antwort Mann