

## Emotionalism in Worship

### Introduction

The banning of all religious gatherings during the time of lockdown has highlighted a serious misconception that exists in the minds of many Christians concerning the presence of the Lord in church meetings. The terminology that is so often used during the time of praise and worship has contributed much to establish this harmful idea. How often do we not hear that the worship team will “now lead us into the presence of the Lord.” As an example of this misconception I quote from an invitation that I recently received:

*“...PRAISE AND WORSHIP EVENING – come and enjoy the evening...the Group will lead us right into the throne room of God...”*

From a New Testament perspective this invitation contains a serious theological error; praise and worship is viewed as a means by which we can enter the presence of God. Nowhere in the New Testament is it stated that singing and music can lead believers into the “throne room” of God. According to Scripture only faith in the atoning blood of Christ Jesus can do so:

*“ Having therefore, brethren, boldness to **enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus**, by the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh...(Heb. 10:19-20, my emphasis).*

### Old and New Testament perspectives concerning praise

The words of **Psalm 22:3** are often used to encourage people to participate in the singing during the time of praise and worship, because *“God inhabits the praises of His people.”* The truth, however, is that seen from a New Testament perspective, God does not inhabit the praises of His people, **He inhabits them!** (**1 Cor. 6:19**). The implication of this fact is that I do not enter God’s presence when I enter a meeting, I bring it in with me. The often quoted line from **Psalm 100:2**: *“Come before His presence with singing”*, should be understood in the same context; because of the fact that the Holy Spirit lives in me, I do not need a protracted session of praise and worship in a meeting to come into in His presence, I live in it!

### The role of emotions in worship

Serious spiritual damaged can be caused when believers associate warm atmospheres and pleasant feelings with the presence of the Holy Spirit. Positive or negative feelings, or circumstances, taken on their own, say absolutely nothing about His presence. Think of the unpleasant circumstances that Paul so often found himself in: whipped, stoned, in shipwrecks, attacked by robbers, in jail, thirsty and sometimes let down by false brethren (**2 Cor. 11:23-28**). In spite of all these negative circumstances, because he held on to God’s promise that He would never leave or forsake him, he was assured of His presence, (**Heb. 13:5**).

The danger of associating warm feelings with the presence of God, is that there is a tendency to feel that God's presence has departed when the emotions are gone. This explains why some believers experience depression directly after the high of a praise and worship meeting – the contrast between the warm atmosphere of the service and the loneliness of a flat or room is just too acute. This is also one of the reasons why some believers are experiencing spiritual isolation during the time of lockdown. If a person does not come to the realisation that God promised to be present, because of the fact of the indwelling Holy Spirit, continual spiritual and emotional instability will be experienced (**Heb. 13:52, 2 Cor. 5:7**).

Spiritual reality is determined by what God says in His Word, not by emotions, atmosphere or circumstances.

### **How should we worship?**

The New Testament doesn't see "worship" as a special time of singing and making music during a selected time in a certain place. According to Paul worship is something that you do with your whole life. See **1 Cor. 10:31**:

*"Whether therefore you eat, or drink, or **whatsoever you do**, do all to the glory of God."*

Worship is first and foremost an inner response to what God has done for us through Jesus Christ and we worship Him by showing him honour and respect in everything we do.

### **What has happened to congregational singing?**

I am all in favour of corporate singing, but in many modern services the sound of the instruments and the voices of the praise and worship team are amplified to such an extent that it drowns the sound of the congregation; whether everybody sings along or not, makes no difference to the overhaul effect.

### **The dangers of soulish worship**

It is not only drugs that can change our mood and behaviour, music can also do it.

Singing and music does nothing to bring us closer to God, no matter how well it is expressed – what it does do is to affect our emotions. For this reason, because pleasant feelings are so commonly associated with the presence of God, they can be very misleading. Feelings, signs, manifestations, miracles and bodily sensations, because they belong to the realm of the senses, and because they can so easily be counterfeited, can never be trusted as proof of the presence of God. Christians should be aware of the fact that Scripture teaches that we live by faith, not by sight or sensual experiences (**2 Cor. 5:7**).

We must be careful that when it comes to worshipping God we do not over emphasise the importance of the "worship" experience in a church service and become deadened to the actual presence of the Holy Spirit in us.

Emotions and other sensual sensations can be experienced as result of the influence of deceiving spirits and they can be wrongly interpreted as the workings of the Holy Spirit. In order to discern between what is soulish or demonic, knowledge of the Word of God is of utmost importance. Knowing for example that Scripture teaches that **self-control** is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit would have prevented many believers from being involved in a move where **uncontrolled** antics like screaming, barking, howling and rolling around on the floor are ascribed to the working of the Holy Spirit. See **Galatians 5:22**:

*“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, **self-control**”* (My emphasis).

## **Conclusion**

Given the lack of personal Bible reading today, especially amongst the youth, and the lack of doctrinal teaching in many churches, what many Christians believe are influenced by the theology that comes across in the lyrics of popular contemporary music. This is an alarming thought given the unscriptural content of many modern Christian songs.

Faith does not come from music, singing or sensual experiences, it is birthed through the preaching of God’s Word (**Rom. 10:17**). The wrong emphasis placed on being in the presence of God in meetings on a Sunday creates a dichotomy in the mind of the believer, making him think that his life is divided into that which is sacred and that which is secular. Worshipping God is something that we should be doing all the time in everything we do (**1 Cor. 10:31**).

May we sing and make music in meetings? Off course we may, but not **in order** to come into a presence or to stir up emotions, but **because** we corporately want to express our appreciation for what God has revealed to us in His word and for what He has done for us in Jesus Christ.

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