

When Worship Becomes Dangerous

When out-of-control emotions invade your worship, they can open the door to deception.

Have you ever heard the saying, “Let’s have a Holy Ghost time!” or “Let’s have church?” These expressions are freely used in our churches today, and rightly so. We should expect that something powerful will happen in our lives when God shows up and manifests His presence.

The Bible is filled with examples of people who had supernatural encounters with God’s awesome power in the Old and New Testaments. One such example is that of the priests who could not even minister in the temple because the cloud of God’s glory was too dense (see 2 Chr. 5:13-14).

But amazing occurrences such as these are not limited to Bible times. In fact, these things are actually on the increase in our world today.

The issue is, How do we distinguish between an authentic spiritual experience and a purely emotional one? When is a service in reality a “Holy Ghost” time?

Ultimately, this question must address the difference between the spirit and the soul realms. Although many theologians argue about the end times and the Battle of Armageddon, I believe there is no greater battle than the classic inner war we all experience between the spirit and the flesh.

THE FLESH IS UNPROFITABLE This very real struggle has to do with your spiritual identity and your position in God. In reality, today many people are dominated by the soul realm—the mind, will and emotions. They live their lives largely driven by their feelings, and their emotionalism is carried over into

their worship.

Indeed, many have become more accustomed to an emotion-filled show than to an authentic spiritual experience. I have personally witnessed many services in which the focus was more on the decibel level of the music and less on God's will for the meeting.

Paul the apostle wrote: "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:14, NKJV).

On one occasion, in the early days of my ministry, I was invited to visit a church as a music guest. At one point, I started singing a familiar chorus and repeated the words, "Holy Spirit, fill me, fill me, fill me."

Soon the people in the congregation began forming a "conga line." For a moment, all this was fine, until, spurred on by the pastor, the people began to go wild.

It became impossible for me to minister. Everyone was out of control, and no one could hear what I was saying.

I was tempted to join in, but then I heard God say, "It's done. I'm done. I can't do anymore. I will not share My glory.

"This is not about Me. This is about them now."

In the middle of the mayhem, I put down the microphone and made my way to the back of the church where my merchandise table was set up. I stood for a few minutes in the back and watched the flurry of activity.

On one end of the room I saw one sister prophesying over another sister. Others were twisting and turning on the floor.

Still others were casting out demons left and right. The pastor was so moved by what was going on that he lost his

hairpiece in the process!

When I left, I felt so sad and empty. I knew God had so many things to do and say that night that were prohibited by the confusion and disorder. What an experience in the soul realm it was!

This incident demonstrated to me how powerfully soulish behavior can impact our worship. It also can have a profound impact on every aspect of our daily lives and the lives of those around us.

BE LED BY GOD'S SPIRIT Soulsh worship is the self-centered fruit of an emotion-driven lifestyle. A life that is ordered according to the dictates of the flesh is a self-consumed existence, one that is all about the individual.

In a soulsh person, the Word of God becomes information that is stored in the mind but never translated into the person's life. This is how we are able to "talk the talk" but never "walk the walk."

A soulsh mind-set influences every area of our lives. Not only does it establish behavioral patterns for us, it also affects the way in which we interact with others.

Yet the most serious problem with living in the emotional realm is that there exists within it the potential for deception. You can be tempted to believe that the experience of "goose bumps" during a worship service is an indication that your personal life meets with God's approval.

Within the soul realm, where emotions are allowed to flow unchecked, spiritual discernment decreases. You can be made to think that your life is in order with God and that therefore, the voices you hear and the feelings you experience must be from Him.

But the things of God are to be discerned in our spirits by

the Spirit. Paul wrote: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (Rom. 8:14).

In order to discern the voice of God in our lives we must walk in the Spirit and in sonship. This has nothing to do with how many times you lose your hairstyle in the service; nor is it measured by religious exercises that are said to get you closer to God.

As Christians we do not cease to have emotions. When God made us, He equipped us with them. I cannot help crying when His presence is manifested to me; many of us respond similarly.

Some may dance or laugh in His presence; that is fine. The danger comes in allowing our emotions to lead us, rather than bringing them under the control of the Holy Spirit.

I have observed some ministry leaders who attempt to manipulate their audiences by their music or sermons. They may be thinking, If I speak what they like, the Spirit will move. Or, If I shake a little and scream a little and pause and look at them intensely a little they will feel God. But God does not need help to make us feel Him.

In Jesus we see the example of perfectly balanced emotions. He ran the gamut of emotional expression. But His feelings were always displayed in submission to the will of His Father (see Matt. 21:12-14).

Jesus said: "'Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works'" (John 14:10).

This is what sonship is about—submitting your will and your emotions to the Father, and being yielded and productive in the spiritual and the natural realm. The focus is not on us but on Christ in us. It is not about your feelings or mine; it is about what God wants.

Controlling, fleshly emotions will always stand in the way of spiritual revivals. But if we are diligent to walk with God and depend on Him, He will do all that is necessary to free us from them.

I believe the Spirit of God is moving, even in the midst of the chaos and disorder in our emotionally charged lives. By His Spirit, He will help us put all things in perspective.

Now is the time for you to examine yourself and question whether or not you are living out of the soulish realm or the realm of the Spirit. Are your decisions based on your emotions? Is your worship grounded in spiritual truth?

God is calling you higher. I would encourage you to take a moment and talk with our Lord.

Ask Him to show you the moments when you may have inappropriately given free reign to your emotions and opened yourself up to be deceived. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you overcome this tendency and to take you into the heavenly realm, where great and mighty things await you.

Take heed to the apostle Paul's advice: "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16).

God is sounding the trumpet in your spirit today. There is more to life in Christ than the occasional emotional high. His truth sown in your heart and mind will produce eternal fruit in your life and in the generations that follow you.

Read a companion devotional.

Doris Machin is a singer, speaker and ordained minister of the gospel.