

BALANCE IN WORSHIP

Joe Slater

Our human tendency toward extremism makes it difficult to find balance in life. Working to provide for your family may degenerate into being a “work-a-holic.” On the other hand, legitimate recreation, taken to the extreme, turns “having fun” into a god.

Extremism takes its toll on worship, too. In some religions, ritualism rules; if you go through the right motions at the right time in the right way, and that’s all that matters. Worship becomes like a trip to the grocery store; you have your list, you check off the items one by one, and when you’re through, you pay the cashier and go home.

On the opposite side of the coin is emotionalism, where spiritual worship is erroneously equated with ecstasy and exuberance. We judge a worship service to be “good” if it made us feel good, excited us, made us cry, made us laugh, or moved us in some other subjective way. If our emotions weren’t sufficiently stimulated, we complain, “I didn’t get anything out of that!”

Both extremes miss the point! Merely completing a check-list is not worship. Neither does worship consist of an emotional high. Worship centers on God, not on you or me. Does God set forth certain things we are to do as we worship Him? Most definitely! But we are to do these things, not in an empty, ritualistic way, but from the depths of our hearts. Jesus said we must worship “*in spirit and in truth*” (John 4:24). There is the balance! Cold formalism leaves out the inner person expressing heart-felt love and devotion to God. Irrational emotionalism sacrifices truth for the sake of doing “whatever makes me feel good.” To be balanced, we must worship from the heart while being directed by God’s word, which is truth (John 17:17).

Emotions will be stirred naturally when we are worshipping God as He directs. How could we possibly eat the bread and drink the cup in memory of Jesus’ death without our emotions being affected? Yet our purpose in communion is not to stir our emotions, but to honor Jesus. The effect on our emotions is secondary. Likewise, how could we sing “Oh, How I Love Jesus” without our hearts swelling with joyous devotion? Still the emotional aspect is a result of worship, not the essence of it.

As brother Kenneth Joines once put it: “Worship is an expression, not an impression.” May we all seek to express our adoration to God rather than to impress ourselves.



Striking Matches

Years ago I heard a gospel preacher (now deceased) tell of an incident that occurred early in his life. He was a young preacher, still in college, and working for a congregation. He was full of ideas. He was full of zeal and enthusiasm. His zeal was evident to all – so much so that one day one of the elders come to him and said, “Son, you need to slow down. Don’t you know you can’t set the world on fire all by yourself?”

The young preacher replied: “You may be right. I may not be able to set the world on fire all by myself. But when the Lord returns, may He find me striking matches!”

What a thought! What a response! Can it be improved upon? Friends, if the Lord returned right now, would He find you striking matches? Give it some thought.

--Steve Higginbotham (Knoxville, TN)

What Would You Give?

A plane was in danger of crashing due to having serious engine problems. Among the many frightened passengers was a wealthy, but non-religious, businessman who began to pray. Eventually the problem was solved; the plane continued to its destination and landed safely.

As the passengers deplaned a preacher approached the businessman and said, "Sir I heard what you said. You told the Lord that if He spared you then you would give Him half of your wealth." The businessman then replied, "Yes, I did say that; however, I made another deal. I told Him that if I ever get back on another plane, He can have it all."

Isn't it true that we all are sometimes guilty of trying to "make deals" with the Lord? Sure it is. Lord, if you do this, I will do that. Lord, if you will give me this, I will give you that. And so it goes.

Truth is, God is not in the business of making deals. And we are not in a position to make deals. Actually, we have nothing to offer. All belongs to God already.

Here's "the real deal." God has presented His "deal" and there is no negotiating. If we simply place our trust in Him, and seek His divine offer, He will take care of us both here and in the hereafter. David said, " Preserve me, O God; for in thee do I take refuge" (Psalm 16:1). Some versions say, "because I trust in you."

What could a man desire in exchange for his soul? Or, the better question is, “Why would a man even consider trading his soul?” God has promised to take care of us in this life and hereafter (Matthew 6:19-34; John 14:2-3). We cannot find a better deal than this!

In view of God's promises, the question for us is this: "What will we give?" Will we give our soul in exchange for the things of this life? Or will we give our life to God and accept His deal?

"For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).

--Roy Allen Crutcher (Mt. Carmel, IL)