

— Spirit Filled Worship — Such people the Father seeks

The worship of God is powerful. When the sons of Ammon, Mount Seir, and Moab attacked Judah, Jehoshaphat countered with fasting, prayer and declarations of faith. When the battle day came he put the choir in front of the army as they advanced on the enemy. Crazy huh? Not so much:

2 Chronicles 20:21 When he had consulted with the people, he appointed those who sang to the Lord and those who praised Him in holy attire, as they went out before the army and said, "Give thanks to the Lord, for His lovingkindness is everlasting." 22 When they began singing and praising, the Lord set ambushes against the sons of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; so they were routed.

The psalmist said:

Psalms 22:3 Yet You are holy, O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel.

When God's people praise and worship Him He inhabits the cloud of praise they create and sets ambushes for the enemy. Our enemy is not a physical army, but a spiritual one made up of fallen angels, principalities, powers, spiritual forces of darkness — all of which have worked together to create strongholds and lofty thoughts raised against the knowledge of God. Praise and prayer are the most powerful weapons against them and their domain. This is why the enemy will do anything to create indifference to prayer and outright fighting about music, the vehicle of praise. Many churches have been divided and weakened by conflict over praise and prayer. There is a solution and it's spirit filling.

Ephesians 5:18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; 20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; 21 and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.



Drunkenness illustrates Spirit filling in a way. A drunk can see where he's going, he just can't go where he's seeing. A Spirit filled believer can't see where he's going, but goes where the Spirit is seeing. Neither

of them have control over themselves. Spirit filling happens when you absolutely surrender to the Holy Spirit and invite Him to come into your soul (heart) and take total control of you. As you surrender to Him, He fills you with Himself like filling a container and He takes control of you, your thoughts, words and actions. He comes into your soul (heart) and immediately begins producing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs which you sing in praise to the Lord. What happened right there? The center and origin of your praise shifted from soul to spirit. Your soul (mind, emotion, will) is the source of your opinions and preferences. When you surrender your soul to the Spirit of God you are laying all those self-focused issues down. Your will is denied and the Spirit's will takes its place. Your thoughts about what you like or don't like are abandoned and the Spirit's thoughts about praising Jesus and the Father take over.

Suddenly there is nothing to fight about. Maybe your soul doesn't like old hymns out of a song book. So what? You aren't acting on the basis of what your soul likes — it's now what the Spirit likes. Maybe you don't like new music with its band and rock style. Doesn't matter, it's now all about what the Spirit likes and He just likes to lift Jesus higher.

That Samaritan woman Jesus talked with by the well thought there was a conflict in worship regarding location — should it be here or there, on this mountain or that mountain?

John 4:19 The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. 20 Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

Jesus responded with the answer that pre-empts everything else. "When things are right true worshipers will worship in Spirit and truth and those are the worshipers the Father wants."

I've made a point of asking worship leaders all across America what they think *worshipping in Spirit* means. It seems that 90% of the time the answer was something like, "Getting the right mood with lighting (or non-lighting), the right instruments, the right songs (with the right style) in the right order and key, and having the right people leading and in the band." I imagine that those things matter in some way, but what do they have to do with worshiping in the Spirit? Aren't they all soulish, preferential things that have to do with what people like or dislike?

What if everyone surrendered to the Holy Spirit as they came into the place of worship? What if each one decided that no matter what the physical issues, "I will be yielded to and controlled by the Holy Spirit and worship in joy?" Oh, and what if the worship leader included a variety of styles of music, showing respect to everyone in the church? Looking again at Ephesians 5, notice the two other results of Spirit filling: attitude gratitude and mutual submission. If everyone is under

the Spirit's control it is possible to encourage everyone and make it easier to worship in unity with diversity.

There are a couple more questions about music. Can it be wrong? The words must be true. Music is as powerful as preaching and it is imperative that the lyrics say just what the Bible says. There are two things to be careful about with regard to the mechanics of music. If the melody, harmony and rhythm come across as sensual or chaotic, they dishonor God and His Word.

Jude 1:3 Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. 4 For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

When grace is twisted into sensuality problems will follow. Faith is at risk and the church can be damaged or destroyed. Music that stimulates a sexual desire that cannot be righteously satisfied is wrong.

Colossians 1:13 For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

The domain of darkness is anchored in chaos, the kingdom of His beloved Son is anchored in beneficence. Chaos produces unrest and rebellion and has no place in a believer's life. The fruit of righteousness flows out of God's kingdom and is always the place for believers to stand.

As you can readily see, Spirit filled worship entails sacrifice. You must give up your claim to your right to yourself and let the Holy Spirit worship through you. The writer encouraged the Hebrews:

Hebrews 13:15 Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.

Talking is a favorite pass time and it's often all about me. When you give up the self-focused conversation and worship God instead it becomes a sacrifice of praise. Your lips are suddenly bearing fruit in thankfulness and God is honored. A room full of people offering up a sacrifice of praise out of Spirit filled hearts while being filled with thankfulness and mutual submission will soon find their praises inhabited by God. He will then set ambushes for the enemy and the praise and worship will be a powerful weapon for his destruction in their church, homes, and community. Awesome!

One other thing — praise not only releases the power of God, it improves the appearance of the worshiper:

Psalms 147:1 Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant and praise is becoming.

Psalms 33:1 Sing for joy in the Lord, O you righteous ones; praise is becoming to the upright.

Praise is the sure path to genuine and lasting beauty.

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