

Dr Shawn Merithew January 30, 2007
HOW DO YOU "FEEL" IN WORSHIP?

I am almost afraid to hear some of your answers to this question. Some of you might say, "Nourished" or "Recharged" or "Touched by God." Others might say, "Sleepy" or "Bored." Still others might say, "It doesn't matter how I 'feel' because worship is not about me, it is about God." With all due respect to your personal "feelings," I hope I can help us to think a bit more biblically on this subject.

In *Desiring God*, John Piper includes an entire chapter on the subject of worship. In reflecting upon Matthew 15:8, ("*This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.*") he notes, "An act of worship is vain and futile when it does not come from the heart. . . . Worship is more than an act of mere willpower. All the outward acts of worship are performed by acts of will. But that does not make them authentic. The will can be present (for all kinds of reasons) while the heart is not truly engaged (or, as Jesus says, is "far away"). The engagement of the heart in worship is the coming alive of the feelings and emotions and affections of the heart. **Where feelings for God are dead, worship is dead.**"

Now please understand my heart (and Piper's heart) in one important regard. We are not looking for a focus on emotion and feelings, nor are we wanting anything to distract from the primary objective of glorifying God. However, we are looking to guard ourselves from the "deadness" of duty. How often do we come to worship and sing songs and bow for prayers and hear sermons, yet our hearts are never engaged. We do not pause to consider the weight of the songs we sing. We do not grieve and weep over sin. We experience no sense of "awe" at seeing the majestic holiness of God. We do not long for God as a bride for her bridegroom. In other words, we "feel" nothing.

To use an analogy of Piper's, it is much like the relationship between husband and wife. A wife desires that her husband "enjoy" her and express emotion over her and delight in being with her. It should make him happy to make her happy. Those emotions might even be visible through tears, embraces, smiles, and shouts of joy. In this sense, such emotions and feelings are true and right and godly. Now, applying that to our worship of God, we too should "enjoy" worship. It is not selfish for us to be visibly awestruck or joyous or moved by worship – in fact, God wants us to be. He is most glorified by children whose greatest delight is honoring Him.

I am afraid that as Baptists, we have allowed our disdain for charismatic practices to kill our hearts for worship. If you doubt my assessment, let me help make the picture clearer. How would our congregation view a person who broke into weeping during the singing of a hymn? How would our congregation view someone who felt led to get down on both knees while singing or praying? What if someone felt led to lie prostrate on the floor during worship? What if someone raised both hands high during worship? How many people would stare at them like they were an alien? Yet in Scripture, we see examples of every one of those things as the people of God are worshipping.

Once again, let me say that I am not in favor of emotion or reactions that do not spring forth from the truth of God's Word and God's presence. I *do* want us to engage our hearts and minds in worship, and I do not want us to quench the Holy Spirit. Many of us may regularly experience true heart worship without any outward signs. I praise God with you! However, if someone were to have an emotional reaction or assume a posture of worship that is unusual for us, I would not want us to persecute them with our stares, our whispers, or with angry glances. I do not seek emotional pandemonium, but I greatly desire for us to worship God with all that we are! Read Psalm 150 this week and see one example of how God desires to be worshiped.