



# Blackfoot Church of Christ

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## **The Difference Between Emotion And Emotionalism In Worship**

By William J. Stewart

The story has been told of a man who visited with a local church for their Sunday assembly. Upon hearing a powerful point from the pulpit, he hollered out, "Amen!" Everyone was quiet, somewhat taken back by his outburst. Minutes later, the preacher spoke mightily of the Lord's victory over death, which prompted the man to give a hearty, "Praise the Lord!" Others in the crowd were visibly uncomfortable with these eruptions. After this second time, someone quietly went over to the man and whispered, "Why are you shouting out like that?" The visitor replied, "I'm praising God." In response, he heard, "Well, we don't do that here."

Sadly, this might be an accurate representation of the exceptionally subdued approach some take regarding the display of emotion in worship. On the other end of the spectrum, you find cunningly orchestrated music used to establish the atmosphere; an emotionally charged evangelist spurring people on with repetitive chants; the hands and bodies swaying to and fro of seemingly mesmerized adherents. As the crowd is further worked into a frenzy, folks may end up rolling about in the aisles, bursting out in uncontrollable laughter, shaking, trembling, jumping, and shouting unintelligible speech.

One writer (J Piper) has said, "Truth without emotion produces dead orthodoxy and a church full of artificial admirers... On the other hand, emotion without truth produces empty frenzy and cultivates shallow people who refuse the discipline of rigorous thought. But true worship comes from people who are deeply emotional and who love deep and sound doctrine. Strong affections for God rooted in truth are the bone and marrow of Biblical worship." Without doubt, emotions have a place in worship. They are God-given, and when kindled and handled properly, worshippers are edified and God is glorified. However, when they are misused,

they beget emotionalism – a profane worship. Webster’s defines emotionalism as “...undue indulgence in or display of emotion...” When “undue indulgence” is given to emotion, the result is more akin to a circus of giddy drunkards than a worship assembly. Displays of unbridled emotion do not give glory to God.

Experiences based solely upon feelings and void of Biblical validity have increasingly become the norm in our religious world. Years ago, while perusing an atheist site, I came across a statement which accurately summarized the results of emotionalism in worship. It is “...used to bring about a sort of altered state of awareness and emotion that does make one more susceptible to make choices you might not normally (like convert) or believe you have experienced a supernatural occurrence.” This reminded me of a faith healing service that I attended about 15 years ago. All manner of emotional manipulation was used to energize the crowd, to create a buzz among the people, to spellbind the audience in preparation for the supernatural experience they were about to have. One can easily get caught up in the moment, get high from the emotion, I’ve even heard it likened to a hypnotic state – but understand, this is not godly worship.

The Bible identifies the heart as the center of man’s intellect (Matthew 13:15, 22), emotions (Matthew 22:37), conscience (Acts 23:1), and volition (Hebrews 4:12). If we are to use our heart appropriately, we cannot forsake any of these. If our heart is to rightly engage in worship of the Almighty God, it must be a conscious decision, combining both our intellect and our emotions. Never should emotions be permitted to override intellect. Our emotions in worship must be a response to our intellectual acknowledgment and acceptance of God, His will, and what He has done for us. When emotions are given dominion, our worship is no longer emotional praise to God based in the facts of His word, but emotionalism, void of intellectual subjection to the will of God.

Worshipping God ought to give rise to a variety of emotions: contrition and sorrow for sin, a fervent longing to be in the presence of God, a trembling awe of the glory of His presence and greatness of His power, thanksgiving for the blessings of God, rejoicing and hope for the salvation which God supplies. Emotion is necessary, but it cannot be the basis of our faith and worship, nor is it an end to itself. Welling up emotions for the sake of being emotional is not sincere worship. It is emotionalism. If we as individuals, and collectively as an assembly of God’s people, do not find our emotions engaged when we worship the Lord, something is wrong. The display of emotion is not irreverent. Praise to God should come from hearts that are bursting with love and adoration for our Lord and Saviour. Our prayers should be heartfelt petitions and occasions of intimate conversation with Jehovah God. If you are moved to tears when seated at the Lord’s table, good. What else should we expect when faced with our culpability in the Lord’s death coupled with the immeasurable love of God in planning for Him

to be the sacrifice for our sins? The reading and preaching of Scripture should stir our emotions, and if we are moved to shout “Amen,” then shout, “Amen.” It is not irreverent to declare your agreement with God’s word.

We need to go no further than the book of Psalms to understand that worshipping God is an emotional experience. David wrote, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart – these, O God, You will not despise” (Psalm 51:17). Contrition necessitates emotion; but not unchecked emotion. In the Psalm, we are witness to the weight of sorrow David’s sin brought upon him, and his thankfulness for God’s mercy. That’s an emotional response to the knowledge of God and His ways; it is not emotion for the sake of emotion.

Again, the psalmist records, “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night, while they continually say to me, ‘Where is your God?’ When I remember these things, I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept a pilgrim feast” (Psalm 42:1-4). Does your soul pant and thirst for the Lord? This is not a humdrum hollow approach to God. The heart of the worshiper is engaged. The mundane church member is clueless about what it means to pour out one’s soul. It requires our affections be kindled and not suppressed. But it is a conscious response to the Lord, to His character and to what He has accomplished for us; it is not a “no holds barred” audacious deluge of hysteria.

Once more, the Psalmist wrote, “Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands! Serve the LORD with gladness; come before His presence with singing. Know that the LORD, He is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. for the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations” (Psalm 100). A joyful sound does not come from that which is monotone and lifeless. But, as much as uninhabited worship is unbecoming of those who approach the God of the living; an uninhibited and clamorous appeal is equally out of place. We should come before God with emotion, but not driven by emotion.

Let us be diligent students of God’s word and enter worship with a readiness to give glory to God and encouragement to our brethren. If we do so, our emotions will most certainly be triggered, as will the emotions of all others who have prepared themselves for worship – but not as the product of human manipulation or manufactured mania, but by our desire to uplift the name of God, in accordance with His will.

## Prayer Requests & Announcements

- Dave and Catherine are in GA this week, they plan to return Wednesday.
- Angie Woodside has been diagnosed with Rheumatoid Arthritis and has started treatments for it.
- Richard Empey's sister is having a pace maker installed this Thursday.
- Richard's friend Jim Scott is having surgery this Wednesday for an aneurism on his heart. This is a very serious condition and prayers are requested.
- The Christians in the Philippines.
- Evie Trokey, the young girl diagnosed with brain cancer started Chemo this week at a Minnesota Hospital. (Trevor Trokey preaches at the church in Rapid City)
- Bible class at Chad & Kass' postponed till next Sunday
- Tom, Chad, and Paxton will be in the Mountain's hunting this week

**For prayer requests, call or text**

Chad @ (208) 221-2587 or Ross @ (208) 680-6590

## Assignments

<b><u>Today</u></b> <b>Bible Study</b> – Ross Ward <b>Song Leader</b> – Ben Palmer <b>Lord's Table</b> – Chad Mitchell <b>Sermon</b> – Ross Ward	<b><u>Wednesday</u></b> <b>Bible Study</b> – Ross Ward <b>Song Leader</b> – David Porter <b>Invitation</b> – Ross Ward
<b><u>Next Sunday</u></b> <b>Bible Study</b> – Ross Ward <b>Song Leader</b> – Chad Mitchell <b>Lord's Table</b> – Tom Porter <b>Sermon</b> – Ross Ward	<b><u>Next Wednesday</u></b> <b>Bible Study</b> – Chad Mitchell <b>Song Leader</b> – Tom Mitchell <b>Invitation</b> – Ross Ward

Blackfoot Church of Christ  
370 North Shilling Ave.  
Blackfoot, Idaho 83221

### **Meeting Times:**

Sunday Morning Classes 10:00AM  
Sunday Morning Worship 11:00AM  
Wednesday Evening 7:30PM



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