

**Introduction:**

“Passionate, Spirit-Filled Worship:” Have you ever seen that on the marquee outside a church building, trying to invite people into their assemblies? Doesn’t that sound exciting? Don’t you want some of that here? Doesn’t that seem to answer a longing we have when we gather together? Regrettably, we often feel like Mary Jo:

“For the past several weeks, Mary Jo has been noticing one of those message billboards that many churches use. This one advertises, ‘Passionate, Spirit-Filled Worship’. Mary Jo is intrigued by the thought that worship could be passionate and filled with spirit. After all, her worship experience usually goes something like this:

“This skirt is too tight for me to breathe – I can’t wait to take it off. I sure hope we finish on time today because I’ve got a casserole in the oven that’s gonna burn if we go overtime. Oh, no, Brother Kerry is making announcements – he always mutilates the names on the sick list. Well, at least we got one of the good song leaders today. #245? I really don’t like that song and we sing it EVERY Sunday. ‘No Tear Dimmed Eyes’ ...that was really a sad movie we watched last night. I just cried and cried when that girl’s mother died... Brother Jordan preaches when he prays – if it’s our bonus sermon, I wish he would get on with it. That screaming kid is driving me nuts! All of the guys at the Lord’s table look so nice except Morris – he always looks like he just got out of bed. Now why did they pass the tray that way? It would have been so much easier to pass it the other way. Oh, isn’t that girl cute! She has such pretty curls...oh, wait, that’s a boy! Why do we have to stand up to sing? It’s always too cold in here. That’s the same sermon we had last month. If you two don’t sit still and be quiet I’m gonna take you out! What? Not now! That’s a really neat graphic on that slide – I wonder where he got that. I need to get on the computer and make those birthday invitations today... and I haven’t ordered the cake. I guess I’ve got to go to the store today. Sit still! That boy’s gonna need some new shoes soon. Now that was a good closing prayer – short and sweet!”

Mary Jo could use a good dose of passionate, Spirit-filled worship. Could you? But what would that really mean? I’m going to let the cat out of the bag early on this one. I’m convinced what most people expect and want is not really passionate, Spirit-filled worship. Please understand, I want passionate, Spirit-filled worship. I want worship that is meaningful, purposeful, and satisfying. I want an encounter with God that deepens my relationship with Him. I just don’t believe the common modern ideas of what that looks like and feels like is accurate. Let’s examine how modern desires compare to the Bible. Then examine what passionate, Spirit-filled congregational assemblies really look like.

**Discussion:**

I. What people expect and want.

- A. Let’s face it. Like Mary Jo, we face a lot of distractions from worship. Some distractions are external: babies crying, phone’s ringing, children misbehaving, someone clipping their nails, a preacher’s nervous quirks and habits, etc. Some distractions are internal: not enough sleep last night, hunger pangs, football fever, bills to pay, etc. Because of these distractions we often long for a different kind of worship experience. What we want is something *Attention Arresting*. We are certain that if the Spirit were really involved in our worship, He would grab hold of us and not let go. We would zone in on the worship and could not possibly zone out. That is what a lot of people want.
- B. Very few people like the same old, same old. Certainly, worshipping God should never get in a rut. That would be boring. After all, we have to compete with television and the movies that train us to move to something new every 10 seconds. Because of boredom, we want a different kind of worship experience. What we want is something *Spiritually Spontaneous*. We are certain that if our worship was passionate and Spirit-filled it would be spur of the moment. Surely we should not have to think about what we are doing. Certainly we should not have to plan it. We are leaving it up to the Spirit to fill us with worship and therefore we are just going to get together and fly by the seat of our pants, as the Spirit pilots us.
- C. When we look at our society, what drives it? Can anyone argue that we are a feelings-driven society? America lives by the motto, “If it feels right, do it.” Because of our feelings we want a different kind of worship experience. We want something *Emotionally Electrifying*. We are certain if worship were passionate and Spirit-filled, shivers and chills would constantly run up and down our spines. We want to feel the presence of God. We want to laugh, cry, and everything in between. We want gut-wrenching, spine-tingling, heart-rending, earth-shattering emotion so we can feel like we have worshipped.

## II. “The way it was in the Bible.”

- A. Many people have this picture of passionate, Spirit-filled worship in their minds and you can hear them say, “We want this kind of worship, because we want worship the way it was in the Bible.” That sounds so noble. But here is the rub. That is not the way it was in the Bible.
- B. Did the New Testament congregations have *Attention Arresting* worship? I am sure at times things were going on that were so moving everyone was glued to them. Like the time in **Acts 20**, when everyone was on the edge of their seats because Eutychus fell out of a third story window and Paul brought him back to life. Of course, up to that point, Paul’s passionate, Spirit-filled sermon was so riveting Eutychus fell asleep and out of the window. Here is the real deal, Spirit-filled worship was not necessarily *Attention Arresting*. I’m not saying the Spirit never did anything attention arresting. I’m simply pointing out that wasn’t the universal norm of congregational gatherings or personal worship in the Bible.
- C. Did they have *Spiritually Spontaneous* worship? Surely they did; after all, they used miraculous gifts; who knew when the Spirit would just take over somebody and they would start talking? Really? Actually, that is not the New Testament picture. In fact, not only did they not have “spontaneous” worship, they were commanded not to. According to **I Corinthians 14:40**, worship assemblies were to be conducted properly and in an orderly manner. According to **I Corinthians 14:27-28**, when the Spirit gave someone something to speak in tongues, they were supposed to see if there was an interpreter available. If not, they were to remain silent. In **14:29-33**, if God granted revelation to one, he was allowed to speak, but if a revelation was then granted to another, the first was to become silent. Then amazingly, Paul says that the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. The Holy Spirit did not make anyone jump up spontaneously and start preaching uncontrollably. I understand that to be decent and orderly doesn’t necessarily mean having our traditional order. I simply hope we can see that even when the Holy Spirit was granting miraculous gifts in the assembly, He wasn’t actually leading it. He expected the congregation to conduct its assembly in decent order.
- D. Did they have *Emotionally Electrifying* worship? I have no doubt people’s emotions were fired up at times. Let’s face it, considering the Lord’s death is an emotional moment. Hearing about false teaching and rebellion against God evokes feelings. Watching someone confess Christ and be baptized into Him is moving. But was worship about feelings? Here is an amazing thing. I ran a search with my bible software for various forms of the word “feel.” Not one single time does the Bible ever say anything about anyone ever feeling the presence of God. Not one single time does the Bible ever say anything about people feeling like they have really worshipped. In fact, I could only find two passages in the Bible, and that only in the New King James Version of the Bible, that connect “feelings” with “worship” at all. **Deuteronomy 4:19** (NKJV) is the first and rebukes those who “feel driven” to worship the stars of heaven. The other is **I Samuel 13:12** (NKJV), in which Saul “felt compelled” to offer an unlawful sacrifice. In other words, the only times we can find even a remote connection to emotion and feelings-based worship, they led to error and idolatry. In the Bible, worship is about faith, not about feelings. We are to have faith in the presence of God, not demand the feeling that He is present.

## III. What God explains (**Ephesians 5:15-21**).

- A. *Personally Circumspect*—In **Ephesians 5:15**, Paul begins this section that deals with Christian living and worship by pointing out that we must be careful how we walk. The KJV says, “Walk circumspectly.” That word “circumspectly” means to look (“spect,” like spectacles) around (“circum,” like circumference). In other words, the foundation for passionate, Spirit-filled living and worship is personal attention. We face distractions; therefore we want something to force us to pay attention. God however says we must be on our guard and pay attention. God will not overwhelm us and make us focus on worship when it is Spirit-filled. Rather, we are passionately worshipping when we are making ourselves focus on Spirit-filled worship.
- B. *Word Governed*—**Ephesians 5:15-21** is the perfect passage for us to study regarding this issue because it commands, “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs...” (ESV). There it is, that’s what we’re looking for—Spirit-filled worship.
  1. Amazingly enough, many have completely missed the point of this passage, thinking it compared being drunk on alcohol and being filled with the Spirit and then came up with that truly awful and unbiblical phrase: “drunk in the Spirit.” Paul was not comparing drinking wine with being filled with the Spirit; he was contrasting them. Drinking alcohol leads to excess, debauchery, and lack of self-control. Being filled with the Spirit leads to worship, not out-of-control worship, but wise, circumspect, reverent worship.

2. But what does being filled with the Spirit mean here? Regrettably too many people just latch on to the phrase without trying to biblically figure out how we go about being filled with the Spirit. This is something Paul commands us to do, not something he says will simply happen to us. Instead of imbibing liquid spirits, imbibe the Holy Spirit. But how?
  - a. First, note the parallelism of **vs. 17** with **vs. 18**. **Vs. 17** says, “Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (ESV). **Vs. 18** says, “And do not get drunk with wine..., but be filled with the Spirit” (ESV). Getting drunk with wine is foolish, but understanding the will of the Lord is being filled with the Spirit. I imbibe the Spirit by imbibing the will of the Lord.
  - b. Second, the grammatical construction of **Ephesians 5:18-21** is fascinating. It gives us a main verb, “Be filled” and then a series of following participles: “...addressing one another...,” “...singing and making melody...,” “...giving thanks...,” and “...submitting to one another...” The purpose of these participles following the main verb is to explain how that main verb actually happens, how it works out. In other words, the Spirit doesn’t fill us mystically and then cause these things, these are the means by which we drink in the Holy Spirit. We do so by <sup>1</sup>speaking to one another in songs, by <sup>2</sup>singing and making melody in our hearts, by <sup>3</sup>giving thanks for all things, and by <sup>4</sup>submitting to one another.
  - c. Third, the parallel passage in **Colossians 3:16** says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs...” (ESV). Do you see it? How do we become filled with the Spirit, understanding the will of the Lord? Not by some spontaneous miracle of worship, but by drinking in the Word of Christ. Which, interestingly, in this passage happens by teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs and by singing with thankfulness in our hearts to God.
3. Spirit-filled worship is not spontaneous emotional outbursts because we just can’t help ourselves in the presence of God. Spirit-filled worship is submitting to God’s will by obeying His Word and worshipping His way based on His Word. Therefore Paul concluded in **Colossians 3:17**, “Whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus...” (ESV). Spirit-filled worship is *Word Governed*.
- C. *God Focused*—Modern expectations are amazingly “me-focused.” I want something to grab me. I want to feel something. I want to receive something. But that is not what biblical passionate, Spirit-filled worship was about. According to **Ephesians 5:19-21**, worship is about submitting to God and fearing Him. Spirit-filled worship is not about us getting anything from God. We have already gotten from God. He gave us His Son, Jesus Christ. Spirit-filled worship is about us giving to Him. Spirit-filled worship is not about us waiting on God to pour something out on us. Spirit-filled worship is about us pouring ourselves out to praise, honor, and thank Him. No wonder in **Romans 12:1**, Paul says worship means being a living sacrifice. God came into the world to sacrifice Himself for us, we live and worship to sacrifice ourselves for Him.
- D. *Others Oriented*—Once again, we find the self-centered nature of modern worship repudiated by **Ephesians 5:19-21**. Not only is worship to be God Focused, it is also to be *Others Oriented*. We do not gather here to have the brethren do for us. We gather here to do for them. This is not about whether they dress to please us, comb their hair to please us, preach to please us, or sing to please us. This is about us giving our all in order to edify others. No doubt, when we worship properly, we will be edified. But as we worship, it is about us helping others and submitting to others in the fear of Christ. That is Spirit-filled worship.

### Conclusion:

I want passionate, Spirit-filled worship. How about you? The problem is what often passes off as passionate, Spirit-filled worship is actually only a mediocre copy of worship. Let me break down for you the problem we encounter. The false notion of worship is more fun than the Biblical notion. It’s more enjoyable. It’s more exciting. Attention Arresting is way more fun than Personally Circumspect. Spiritually Spontaneous is way more adventurous than Word Governed. Emotionally Electrifying is way more exciting than God Focused and Others Oriented. This is really like the difference between watching a Rom Com and actually being married. The movie will grab your attention; the marriage requires you to attend. The movie offers momentary pleasure; the marriage requires ongoing discipline. The movie takes you for a ride; the marriage requires you do the pedaling. The movie is two hours of fun and excitement, but over the long haul is neither meaningful, satisfying, nor fulfilling; the marriage, however, in any given two-hour segment may be boring, but over the long haul is very meaningful, satisfying, and fulfilling. I don’t want to sacrifice a truly, ever-deepening worship relationship with God for a couple hours of personal pleasure every week. Do you? I’d rather sacrifice my pleasure for God’s glory, after all, He sacrificed His pleasure for my salvation. It seems only right? How about you?