

THE PRAISE AND WORSHIP MOVEMENT

By Denver Cheddie

The Word of God endures forever. Occasionally movements and organizations come unto the scene and fall just as quickly as they rise. In recent times a movement which has gained prominence is the praise and worship movement. Abraham Maslow once said, "If a man is good with a hammer, to him everything looks like a nail." Proponents of the P&W movement see praise and worship in just about every scripture in the Bible. In my opinion they place a higher emphasis on the subject than the Bible does.

There is certainly nothing wrong with praising God. It is our duty to praise him because He is great and greatly to be praised. Praise is good. However they believe that when we praise God, He comes down and showers us with blessings, people are healed, demons scatter and victories are won. This is where I disagree with them.

God Comes Down?

Proponents of P&W movement believe that when we praise God, his presence descends upon us together with all the blessings associated with his presence – miracles, healing etc. Oftentimes the lack of miracles is attributed to people not praising God enough. They even quote the following scripture for support, "God inhabits the praises of His people." One would search in vain to find it in the Bible. What Ps. 22:3 does say is that God

inhabits the praises of **Israel**.^[1] In the OT when they did not have the indwelling Holy Spirit, God had to come down to them. Today we have the Holy Spirit. We cannot have God any more than we already do. There is no longer any need for God's presence to come down to us anymore than He is already here.

God's Concentrated Presence?

OK so God is already here, but there is a concentrated presence of God^[2] that manifests when we praise him. Let it be known that no one from reading the Bible could just arrive at this idea of a concentrated presence of God. This comes from people's experiences when they praise God. Many, due to emotional experiences and/or crowd effects, feel goose bumps and various other sensations which they mistake for the presence of God. They feel that they feel God. However this is just innocent ignorance. What they feel are normal human sensations that could be felt in many other settings totally unrelated to God. There is a general presence of God in the sense that He is everywhere (Ps. 139:7-9). If there is a concentrated presence of God, it is where the 3rd Person of the God Head resides – in those who believe in Jesus Christ. This is the case whether or not they praise God.

Miracles?

It is claimed that God performs miracles among his people when they praise him. Show me the evidence. Miracles and healing in the lives of apostles occurred when God manifested the gifts of healing, not when people praised him. In fact, people tended to praise God after the miracle rather than

before, which is the purpose of a “wonder”.[3] In James 5:15 , God heals in answer to prayer not in response to praise.

Demons Scatter?

When Jesus was confronted by the devil, He did not start repeating mantras of praise to His Father. He used the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Interestingly no part of the armor (Eph. 6:11-18) says anything about praise. According to James 4:7, the devil flees when we resist him.

Paul and Silas

Much is made over the fact that the prisons were opened when Paul and Silas praised God, the spiritual lesson being that when we praise God, our personal prisons are opened and we are set free from many bondages. I thought it was God’s grace that set us free (Gal. 5:1, 2). In Acts 16:25, it states that they were singing hymns **and praying** there was an earthquake. It did not say whether it was their prayers or praise that opened the prisons, or for that matter whether God just intervened of His own since it was not time for Paul and Silas to die. It should be noted that Peter was also in jail and it was the prayers of the saints that moved God to get him out (Acts 12:5). God answers prayer, not praise. In Jesus’ pattern prayer, praise is an essential part, but not as mystical and magical as P&W proponents would have us believe. Also both Peter and Paul were eventually executed. Jesus told Peter what his fate would be (John 21:18, 19). No amount of prayer or praise would have been sufficient to avert God’s will.

Jehoshaphat

In 2 Chron. 20:22, when Israel praised God, God fought on their behalf and defeated their enemies. Quite a few observations are in order.

- 1) There were many times when God used other means to give Israel victory, so this praise and worship method was not the norm.
- 2) God's word through the prophet (20:14-17) mentioned nothing of praise and worship, but simply that Israel should trust Him. It was Jehoshaphat's idea that the singers should praise God (vs. 21).
- 3) What really wrought victory was their faith (vs. 20). Looking at an army approaching them to fight, they were asked to just do nothing and watch God fight for them. That required faith. The same thing is true of Joshua when he was asked to march around the walls of Jericho. It was not the marching, but the obedience that mattered. If God had told him to squat like a duck and say quack seven times, the walls would have fallen just the same.
- 4) God had to justify himself. It was his decision not to attack Moab and Ammonites in the first place (vs. 10 cf. Deut. 2:9,19), now they were attacking his people during their time of weakness.
- 5) The people marveled at how God fought for Israel (vs. 29). Most likely the purpose of God working in this manner was to teach Israel to trust Him and to show the other nations who God really was. It is hardly likely that God was setting a precedent that praising Him is a certain means of gaining victory.

Isaiah 61:1-3

Proponents of the praise and worship movement interpret the expression in verse 3, ***the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness***, as an indication of how the Holy Spirit works in our time i.e. whenever we feel ***heavy*** (tired and not feeling to praise God), we ought to praise Him anyway, for it is a demon (spirit) of heaviness that brings about such a condition.

This interpretation is wrought with errors. First of all, it is Jesus who gives us the garments of praise, we don't have to put it on ourselves. Secondly, the word ***heavy*** does not mean tired and reluctant to praise God. It means depressed. The spirit of heaviness is not a demon that causes people to not feel like praising God, rather it is a condition of the human spirit where a person has a depressed countenance. It is usually the result of persecution and sorrow. Even Jesus was heavy (Matt. 26:37; Mark 14:33). Thirdly Jesus quoted the first half of this prophesy in Luke 4:18,19 as it pertained to His first coming. The common sense interpretation is that the last part of it, which includes the giving of garments of praise, relate to the Second Coming. When Israel are in the midst of deep tribulation, being persecuted from all sides, and depressed (heavy), Jesus will return to conquer their enemies, establish them in His eternal kingdom, and with that clothe them with the garments of praise. That latter half of this prophesy is a millennial prophesy.

It could be said that that prophesy is partially fulfilled in our time. God does give us songs in the night. In times of depression He gives us peace and

contentment. But this is far from the interpretation of the praise and worship movement.

Training for Reigning?

Some say that if we do not know how to praise God now, we would not be able to praise him in heaven. They see this life as a training ground in order to reign with Christ in the next life. First of all, they assume that people in heaven praise God exactly as they do. In Revelation, people did not praise God in a wild eccentric manner, but in an organized and orderly fashion.

Secondly they assume that we will experience a gradual transition from earth to heaven. Instead the Bible teaches an instantaneous transformation (1 John 3:2; Phil. 3:20). We will be drastically and dramatically changed from what we are now. How faithfully we **serve** God in this life, determines what reward we get in the next.

We ought to praise God for who he is and what he has done. If we do it in order to get something, then our praise is not genuine. We live in the expectation that God will give us good gifts, but praising God as a formula to obtain blessings is an attempt to manipulate God.

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[1] NIV: God is the praise of Israel.

[2] Matt. 18:20 actually speaks of God being present in judicial manner.

[3] The gifts of healing are not congregational gifts which are manifested when we praise God. The only congregational gifts mentioned in 1 Cor. 14 are prophesy, tongues and interpretation. The gifts of healing traditionally are manifested in missionary settings. It is totally unrelated to praise and worship.