

# The Bulletin

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### ***“Who Is Closer To God?”***

by Bob Pulliam



Now don't get me wrong! This is not a contest mentality being advocated here. But the question does enter my mind. I surfed over a channel the other day where people had the lights dimmed low, all were holding candles and swaying while singing *Alleluia*. I'm not trying to poke fun at anyone ... this is a serious question that I believe is worthy of consideration ... Do we not get close to God with the lights on? Do we not get close to God if we do not violate Fire Marshal's ordinances and light hundreds of candles? Do we not get close to God if we do not sway and close our eyes while we sing? I'm serious!

Let me give you a simple, and realistic scenario here. Someone comes to worship with us on Sunday morning, and we sing *Alleluia*. The lights are on, eyes are open, and no one is swaying. That same visitor goes across town on Sunday evening and sings the same song with the lights off, candles lit, eyes closed, bodies swaying. The visitor goes away saying, "I felt so much closer to God this evening than I did this morning." Are you with me on this? ... I don't like to be

critical, but there is more than one vital problem here. Let me lay them out for you:

1. This person bases "closeness" to God on feelings. Would you find that in the Bible for me? Where did people in the Bible seek a relationship with God based on emotion? The Bible does speak of the heart in our service to God, but did you know that the emotions are only a fraction of what the word heart refers to in Scripture? About one-fourth to be more precise ... The heart refers to the intellect of man (Matthew 9:4; Mark 2:8); the will of man (II Corinthians 9:7; I Corinthians 7:37); the conscience of man (Acts 2:37); and the emotions (which I doubt that we need to give Scripture for, since that seems to be all some people see in this word ... but here's one, Psalms 33:21).
2. This person cannot "get close" to God without external stimulation. That's not just wrong — that's pitiful. Now you can call this judging all you want, but such does not erase the fact that this person needs external stimuli to feel close to God! I can understand how someone can be moved by external stimuli; but being moved by such does not make one closer to God. It just makes you feel closer! Buddhist monks are around darkened rooms and candles every day; but it doesn't make them better people, or closer to any so-called deity.
3. This person will not allow the true basis of being close to God as a guide for their lives. They think that basis is emotion; but the Bible says otherwise. They think that their emotions are God calling them and drawing them, and is evidence of their "knowing the Lord". John wrote, "*Now by this we*

*know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.*" (I John 2:3) By what do we "know Him"? The way we feel? John went on to write, *"He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."* (I John 2:4) But didn't Jesus say, *"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day."*? (John 6:44) We commonly hear people talk about how God was calling them in this way or that way. They will go to this verse to verify their conviction. But wait! Read the next verse: *"It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me."* (John 6:45). How does God draw people? By hearing and learning, not emotional feelings. Consider the conversions in Acts for a moment. Which of those cases ever involved God calling through emotions? Shouldn't that tell you something?

The danger here is very great. *"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."* (Romans 10:17). Faith based on feelings has these warnings to contend with: *"He who trust in his own heart is a fool."* (Proverbs 28:26). *"There is a way that seemeth right to a man, but the end thereof is the way of death."* (Proverbs 14:12). *"I know, O Lord, that a man's way is not in himself, nor is it in a man who walks to direct his own steps."* (Jeremiah 10:23) *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."* (Proverbs 3:5)

Feeling saved, or good about one's self is dangerous business (Matthew 7:21-23). Our feelings should be based on our faithfully fulfilling the word of God. By this we will know that we know Him, and our joy may rest in truth, rather than subjective feelings.

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## **"Trusting God When Afraid"**

by Wayne S. Walker

*"Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You"* (Psalm 56:3). Jesus told us, *"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell"* (Matthew 10:28). The fact is that *"God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind"* (II Timothy 1:7). Indeed, as John reminds us, *"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love"* (I John 4:18). In other words, there is really nothing in this life of which the child of God needs to be afraid.

While the Christian knows these things to be true, fear is still a natural human emotion to certain situations. When we are threatened with danger, when economic conditions point to a possible loss of job, when we are stricken with a serious illness, or when other problems arise which might disrupt our normal lives, we are likely to become afraid. What makes us most fearful about all such situations is that we simply do not know what the future holds. As long as things are going reasonably well, we usually assume that they will continue to do so and are not fearful. However, difficulties cause us more to look to the future and remind us that we do not know what will happen, so we feel afraid.

It is certainly true that *"you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away"* (James 4:14). John Henry Newman noted, "I was not ever thus, nor ever asked that Thou Shouldst lead me on; I loved to choose and see my path; but now Lead Thou me on." When events occur that darken the way so that I cannot "choose and see my path," I tend to become somewhat frightened. That is why Jesus teaches me, *"Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble"* (Matthew 6:34).

The Psalmist knew that times would arise when he would be afraid. However, his determination was that in such times he would trust the Lord. In fact, he went on to say, *"In God (I will praise His word), in God I have put my trust: I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?"* (v. 4).

The Hebrew writer quotes this statement to remind us that we need to trust God whenever we are afraid. *"Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we may boldly say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?'"* (Hebrews 13:5-6).