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OPEN

Why do we like carbonated beverages? Catherine Woods explains in her article [What's all the fuss about fizzy drinks](#) that it is the sensation of pain!

We are all seekers of sensations. In a very insightful lecture [Dr. Archibald Hart](#) explains that the seeking of greater and greater thrills leads to a condition known as *anhedonia*. This is an inability to feel pleasure, due to the fact that our pleasure center has been overstimulated. This has even has an impact on our ability to relate to God

Sensationalism or experientialism does impact our understanding of the Gospel. Sensationalism is not a particular worship experience but occurs when we so crave a certain spiritual experience that we fail to meet Jesus! We come to believe that only this experience will satisfy – whether it is wild and ecstatic or quiet and contemplative.

The Corinthian Church struggled with sensationalism. It stands to reason that people from an ancient city so steeped in pagan worship rituals and immorality would have a steep learning curve when it came to worshipping Jesus together. In his letter to them Paul addressed division, sexual sin, idolatry, and the misuse of spiritual gifts. Read carefully through **I Corinthians 14:26-33**.

DIG

[A] When you come together - v. 26

Gathering was a given for the early church. This was complicated by spiritual baggage, whether it was a legalistic (Jewish) or a pagan background. The recommended ingredients of the Corinthian worship gatherings included hymns (psalm), a lesson (teaching), revelations, tongues, and interpretation. So when they came together it was to be purposeful and productive. All was to be done for the “edification” or the “building up” of the Body of Christ. This term refers to a building, especially a home – see also **Ephesians 2:22**.

[B] What you do together - vv. 27-32

In I Corinthians 14 Paul dealt extensively tongues (utterances in another or heavenly language) and prophecy (utterances declaring God’s message to a person or issue). Notice the comparison of these gifts in **verses 23-25**. Today, there are some who see these gifts as necessary but concluded; others view them as valid yet private; others consider them essential and to be practiced. How does Paul’s advice about tongues and prophecy help Christians today avoid the pitfall of sensationalism?

• **Do it well - vv. 27-28**

Paul didn’t forbid tongues but urged they be done well or not at all. Tongues are not to be a spectacle but must build up the Body. If we only chase after the sensation of tongues messenger will be glorified rather than Jesus.

• **Do it wisely - vv. 29-32**

Prophecy should be “weighed carefully” or “evaluated”. Wise discernment guards against the experience of the message becoming elevated above the spiritual substance. As Neil Anderson says, we settle for a “power encounter” when what we need is a “truth encounter”.

[C] Why you are together - v. 33

Why gather for worship? God’s very nature is about peace **and** partnership. He is not confusing but establishes what is sound, right, and peaceful. And this reality should be evident in every gathering of believers. But sensationalism...

- ...creates a competitive focus upon what entertains leading to division
- ...supports a celebrity culture in the church, pressuring people to fall in line
- ...establishes scripted ways of engaging with God, which are not free
- ...compromises moral commands in favor of what is popular and attractive

In very blunt terms, sensationalism sidelines Jesus. However, the Gospel is not me-centered but Jesus centered.

REFLECT

Are we in danger of missing Jesus by sensationalism? Let’s be careful. Just as we noted about moralism or ritualism, this is a very subtle danger. It is not about the experience or sensation in and of itself. One person can meet God in a certain experience and in the very same kind of experience another person will be so caught up in the sensation that he or she will not engage with Jesus!

This is what started to happen a church in Watford, England. There was very high quality of musical worship, led by gifted musicians. But sensationalism was stealing from a meaningful encounter with Jesus. So the pastor, Mike Pilavachi, took away the band and sound system and asked his congregation:

*When you come through the doors on a Sunday,
what are you bringing as your offering to God?*

Out of this experience came the song [The Heart of Worship](#), written by Matt Redman who was the worship leader. Listen to these words and consider where you are at in this question of sensationalism and the Gospel.

*When the music fades, all is stripped away, and I simply come
Longing just to bring something that’s of worth that will bless your heart
I’m coming back to the heart of worship, and it’s all about You, Jesus
King of endless worth no one could express, how much you deserve
Though I’m weak and poor all I have is yours, every single breath
I’ll bring you more than a song for a song in itself is not what you have required
You search much deeper within through the way things appear,
You’re looking into my heart*