

In Defaming Move, Church Website Blocked as 'Porn'

Aykan Erdemir, a member of Turkey's parliament, plans to travel to Diyarbakir Church in mid-June. This week, to prepare for his visit, he looked up the church's website.

He didn't get far. His office computer in the parliament blocked the church website with a message that it contained "pornographic" content.

Checking the websites of other Turkish Protestant churches, Erdemir and his colleagues found they also were blocked, though the filtering screens did not mention "pornography" as the reason.

The website for Diyarbakir Church, in southeastern Turkey, is not under a national ban, although on occasion, websites are banned in Turkey—the most notable in recent months being YouTube.

The block affected computers in the parliament only, and it was quickly removed after Erdemir complained.

"The lifting of the block on the Diyarbakir Church website was a small step for Internet freedoms in Turkey, but a big step for internet freedom in the Parliament," he said.

Erdemir, representing the western province of Bursa in the main opposition Republican People's Party, said the episode is a symptom of deep-rooted governmental antagonism toward Christians, especially Protestants, and of Turkey's increasing intolerance towards minorities.

"Humiliating, embarrassing and defaming" is how he described the block on the website.

The newspaper *Daily Hurriyet* reported Thursday that the filter

killed two birds with one stone: It aimed to prejudice Parliamentarians, and to attack minority groups.

“They are just trying to support their own party’s politics and agendas with inflammatory and marginalizing language,” said Ahmet Guvener, pastor of the Diyarbakir Church. “This is embarrassing and outrageous and they should apologize for this.”

Guvener, a convert from Islam, said he does not feel he has equal rights with other Turks. He said his country regards him as a threat. His phone, he said, has been tapped since 2007, when three Christians were tortured and murdered in the city of Malatya.

“They have been listening to my phone without a break since Malatya,” Guvener said. He claims to have seen his name on wiretap lists, and said police continue to question him about subjects he has discussed on the phone with other Christian believers.

He said he believes law enforcement authorities consider Christianity to be one of the country’s greatest threats, and that military training has reinforced an attitude of marginalization.

“They really don’t see Turkish Christians as citizens of this country,” he said. “Turkey knowingly intimidates Christians here, so in my opinion the block on our website was done knowingly.”

Guvener’s lawyer has petitioned the deputy secretary general of the Turkish Parliament, Kemal Kaya, to explain why the church website was blocked. Guvener said legal action against the Parliament remains a possibility.

Erdemir, an advocate of religious and minority rights in Turkey and author of Turkey’s Hate Crimes Bill, said changing the Parliament’s internet settings by itself won’t end anti-

Christian behavior.

“The only way to remedy it is to embrace tolerant values,” he said.

The MP said official discrimination is felt more keenly among Turkey’s Protestants than among more established churches, and that a “paranoia” pervades the country about missionary activities, in particular conversions from Islam to Christianity.

“But it’s not an issue that can be solved at the legal level,” he said. “It necessitates transforming mentalities, sensitivities and attitudes” among the country’s bureaucrats, lawmakers and journalists.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Turkey’s ruling AK Party have come under fire in the last year from protests against the decline of Turkey’s secularism and allegations of corruption. Erdemir has had his own difficulties getting the Parliament, controlled by the AK Party, to take up his hate-crime bill.

“The prime minister’s policies actually profit from polarization, discrimination and hate speech,” Erdemir said. “So I don’t have any expectations from the government when it comes to establishing a multicultural pluralist and tolerant society.”

On With It!

Has God called you to go against the grain and swim against the tide? Has He called you to accomplish an impossible task? If so, this article is for you.

While in Israel leading a tour group last week, I was reminded again of the miracle of the modern Hebrew language, a language now spoken by little children in playgrounds after being used only in written, academic, or religious forms for almost 2,000 years.

How can a dead language come back to life? How can a language used for centuries only in Jewish halls of study and prayer become the daily language of a thriving nation?

When Eliezer Ben-Yehuda sensed a calling to revive the Hebrew language as a key to the restoration of his Jewish people to their ancient homeland, he was met with scorn and mockery, especially from religious Jews who felt he would be defiling the holy tongue.

And the odds were completely against him. Not only was the task unprecedented and seemingly impossible, but he was dying of tuberculosis and given only months to live, although still a young man.

The rest, as they say, is history—and what amazing history it is.

The blurb to Robert St. Johns' classic biography of Ben-Yehuda states, "The biography of Ben-Yehuda is the touching and inspiring story of a frail scholar burning with an inner fire, whose fanatical devotion to a single idea triumphed against overwhelming odds."

This reminds me of John Wesley's letter to William Wilberforce, written Feb. 24, 1791, just a few days before Wesley's death at the age of 88.

Wilberforce, who had been converted through Wesley's ministry, was a member of Parliament, determined to put an end to slavery and the slave trade in the British Empire. This too was an impossible task. The slave trade had been a way of life for the Empire for centuries, deeply intertwined with the

economy and affecting millions of people.

Wesley wrote, "Unless the divine power has raised you up to be as Athanasius contra mundum [Athanasius against the world], I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that execrable villainy which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? O be not weary of well doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of his might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it."

This one line speaks to every one of us called by God to do the impossible, whether that means ending legalized abortion on demand, turning the tide of homosexual activism, breaking the back of human trafficking, transforming the inner cities, or whatever the impossible task might be: "Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils."

In our own strength and wisdom we will fail. Count on it. The opposition is too intense and the spiritual and natural forces we are combatting too powerful.

But that is not bad news to me. Instead, it is good news, since we are not relying on our strength or wisdom or power or networking or funding or abilities. We are relying on God Himself. As Wesley wrote, "But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God?"

That's the perspective we must hold on to if we are to see victory and transformation come.

That's why Paul exhorted the Ephesians to "be strengthened by the Lord and by His vast strength" (Eph. 6:10). We are leaning on His strength, His might, His power, His wisdom, doing His will, not ours.

As I have reminded the Lord in prayer many times over the years, "Lord, this was Your idea, not mine! This is not something I dreamed up, nor is it a task that I created. I'm only seeking to do Your will!"

It was only after decades of frustration and defeat that Wilberforce saw victory come and again, as they say, the rest is history. Wilberforce was God's agent on the earth.

This was the perspective that empowered missionaries to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, overcoming impossible odds and facing down demonic strongholds that most of us could never imagine. And they often did it virtually alone, with limited funding, serving in the midst of hostile, foreign surroundings, not to mention battling through weakness and sickness and abandonment.

Yet their eyes were fixed on the one who said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18), and He was their source of hope and courage.

As William Carey, the man known as the father of modern missions, once wrote from India, "Now all my friends are but one; I rejoice, however, that He is all-sufficient, and can supply all my wants, spiritual and temporal."

To quote another missionary pioneer, J. Hudson Taylor, "We are a supernatural people; born again by a supernatural birth; we wage a supernatural fight and are taught by a supernatural teacher; led by a supernatural captain to assured victory."

In this world, we will have tribulation and battle and, often, insurmountable obstacles to overcome. Jesus Himself guaranteed it (see John 16:33). But He not only guaranteed that there would be pressure and difficulty and persecution in this world. He overcame the world, and in Him, we are overcomers too.

As John explained, "whatever has been born of God conquers the

world. This is the victory that has conquered the world: our faith" (1 John 5:4). That's why Catherine Booth could say on her deathbed, "The waters are rising but so am I. I am not going under, but over."

So remember Eliezer Ben-Yehuda (who didn't even know our Messiah) and John Wesley and William Wilberforce. Remember the missionary pioneers and the world changers and the spiritual revolutionaries. And renew your confidence in the One who died and rose again, and put your entire hope in Him.

And then . . . go forward. On with it!

Michael Brown *is author of Can You Be Gay and Christian? Responding With Love and Truth to Questions About Homosexuality and host of the nationally syndicated talk radio show The Line of Fire on the Salem Radio Network. He is also president of FIRE School of Ministry and director of the Coalition of Conscience. Follow him at AskDrBrown on Facebook or at @drmichaellbrown on Twitter.*

It's Time to Tear Down Your Idols

Knowing God's truth is an absolute necessity in our journey to freedom, but so is our truthfulness. Psalm 51:6 says God desires "truth in the inner parts" (NIV). God's truth and our truthfulness are both needed in order to gain complete freedom in Christ.

I mention the importance of honesty because I may be about to get more honest than some of you can stand. I ask you to consider what I have to say: Many Christians are not satisfied

with Jesus.

Before you call me a heretic, let me set the record straight: Jesus is absolutely satisfying. In fact, He is the only means by which any mortal creature can find true satisfaction.

However, I believe a person can receive Christ as Savior, serve Him for decades and meet Him face to face in glory without ever experiencing satisfaction in Him.

Rather than waste our effort on worthless things, God wants us to find satisfaction in Him. When we look to other sources, we are guilty of idolatry.

The True Source of Satisfaction

In Isaiah 55, the prophet contrasts the world's attempt to find satisfaction with what God provides. It is one of the most poetic and comely expressions of grace in either the Old or the New Testament.

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost” (v. 1).

On the heels of the invitation, God poses the question that haunts every generation of Adam's descendants, “Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?” (v. 2). In effect, God is asking, “Why do you work so hard for things that are never enough, can never fill you up and are endlessly insufficient?”

Like a frustrated parent determined to get through to his child, God says, “Listen to Me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare” (v. 2).

Satisfaction in Christ can be a reality. I know from experience, and I want everyone to know how complete He can make us feel.

I believe God's prescription for those who possess an inner thirst and hunger they cannot fill is implied in Isaiah 55:6: "Seek the Lord while He may be found; call on Him while He is near."

I believe God creates and activates a nagging dissatisfaction in every person for an excellent reason: He doesn't want anyone to perish (2 Pet. 3:9).

God wants everyone to come to repentance. He gave us a will so we could choose whether or not to accept His invitation, but God purposely created us with a need that only He can meet.

Many come to Christ out of their search for something missing; yet after receiving His salvation, they go elsewhere for further satisfaction. Christians can be miserably dissatisfied if they accept Christ's salvation yet reject the fullness of daily relationship that satisfies.

Dissatisfaction is a "God thing." It's only a terrible thing when it fails to lead us to Christ, because the only thing that will truly satiate our thirst and hunger is Him.

Dismantling the Idols

Realizing that God desires for us to find genuine satisfaction in Him helps us discover a primary obstacle in our journey to freedom in Christ: settling for satisfaction in anything else. God gave this practice a name I was unprepared to hear—idolatry.

After serious meditation, I realized the label made perfect sense no matter how harsh it seemed. Anything we try to put in a place where God belongs is an idol.

To experience real freedom in Christ, we must remove the obstacle of idolatry. We begin by recognizing the obstacle as idol worship, but we may find removing it difficult.

Other obstacles to freedom, such as unbelief and pride, can be

removed effectively by an act of the will. But our idols—things or people we have put in God’s place—can take much longer to remove.

Some of them have been in those places for many years, and only the power of God can make them budge. We remove them by acknowledging their existence and admitting their inability to satisfy us fully.

The nation of Israel struggled horribly with the sin of idolatry. We can observe some of the results in the lives of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah.

Isaiah recorded what he saw when he looked at Judah and Jerusalem. The passage sounds hauntingly like prosperous America.

He said of Israel: “They are full of superstitions from the East; they practice divination like the Philistines and clasp hands with pagans. Their land is full of silver and gold; there is no end to their treasures. Their land is full of horses; there is no end to their chariots” (Is. 2:6-7).

In the first words of verse 6, Isaiah wrote, “You have abandoned Your people.” Isaiah concluded that he saw no sign of God’s presence there.

God had promised not to abandon them, and He didn’t. But where sin is rampant He is certainly capable of removing the signs of His presence.

The nation of Israel had been given everything, yet they refused to receive and be satisfied. They traded in what their hearts could know for what their eyes could see.

Isaiah reminds us that a person’s idols can profit him nothing and will ultimately reap shame (Is. 44:10-11). He gives us several glimpses at the destructiveness of idols.

In Isaiah 44:12, he wrote, "The blacksmith takes a tool and works with it in the coals; he shapes an idol with hammers, he forges it with the might of his arm. He gets hungry and loses his strength; he drinks no water and grows faint." People can become so engrossed in their idols that they no longer pay attention to their physical needs.

According to Isaiah, idols can also take the form of humans. "[The carpenter] shapes it in the form of man, of man in all his glory, that it may dwell in a shrine" (v. 13). We can apply this point literally. At some time each of us has exalted someone to a place where only God belonged.

Even after such a catalog of idolatry, God promised, "'I will not forget you'" (v. 21). The mercy of God is indescribable, isn't it?

He swept away their offenses like a cloud, their sins like the morning mist. As we face some of the idols we have worshiped in our quest for satisfaction, we need never doubt the mercy of God. He asks one thing: "'Return to Me, for I have redeemed you'" (v. 22).

There is a strong tie between our quest for satisfaction and the worship of idols. This is due to the fact that the void God created in our lives for Himself will demand attention.

Filling the Void

We look desperately for something to satisfy us and fill the empty places. Our craving is so strong that the moment something or someone seems to meet our need, we feel an overwhelming temptation to worship it.

In my opinion, one of the most thought-provoking verses in Isaiah 44 is verse 20. Read it carefully: "He feeds on ashes, a deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself, or say, 'Is not this thing in my right hand a lie!'"

Fresh conviction washes over me like a squall. How many times have I fed on ashes instead of feasting on the life-giving Word of God?

How many times has my deluded heart misled me? How many times have I tried to save myself?

I could fall on my face at this moment and praise God through all eternity for finally awakening me to say, "This thing in my right hand is a lie."

I can remember one thing in particular I held on to with a virtual death grip. I also remember the harrowing moment God opened my eyes to see what a lie I had believed. I cried for days.

I originally thought this lie was a good thing. My heart, handicapped in childhood, had deluded me. Although I didn't realize it at the time, I eventually worshiped it.

My only consolation in my idolatry is that I finally allowed Him to peel away my fingers and, to my knowledge, I have grasped only His hand since.

I plunged to the depths before I discovered satisfaction. And I pray to settle for nothing less the rest of my days.

I am very aware that Satan will constantly cast idols before me. But I hope never to forget that I could fall again.

Beloved, whatever we are gripping to bring us satisfaction is a lie—unless it is Christ. He is the Truth that sets us free (John 8:32).

We easily can be led into captivity by seeking other answers to needs and desires that only God can meet. Perhaps you've experienced an empty place deep inside that you tried your best to ignore or to fill with something other than God.

If you are holding anything in your craving for satisfaction

right now, would you be willing to acknowledge it as a lie? Would you lift it before Him and confess it as an idol?

God does not condemn you. He calls you.

Will you open your hand to Him? He is opening His to you.

Beth Moore is a writer and teacher of best-selling Bible studies whose public speaking engagements carry her all over the world. She's also the founder of Living Proof Ministries. A dedicated wife and mother of two, Moore lives in Houston with her husband, Keith.

6 Bible Truths About Pornography

The Bible is the “word of truth.” It’s mankind’s user manual. It’s the blueprint, even in suffering, for a joyful and fulfilled existence in this life, and an incomprehensibly glorious eternity in the next. The total truths and precepts inherent within the Judeo-Christian scriptures are both timeless and universally applicable to all people and peoples across the globe, be they Christian, Jew or pagan.

Obviously, neither pornography nor pornography use, in the modern sense, was around during ancient biblical times. Still, since all time is biblical time, and since the Bible transcends time and space, God, in His boundless love and wisdom, has given us specific truths that directly apply to the use and abuse of modern pornography in all its ugly forms.

Studies indicate that at least 70 percent of American men and 30 percent of American women regularly view online

pornography. The numbers aren't much better among Christians with a 2011 ChristiaNet survey finding that 50 percent of Christian men and 20 percent of Christian women regularly use porn.

The following is in no way a comprehensive analysis of the devastating medical, mental, spiritual and societal pitfalls associated with porn use. Neither is it a complete examination of what the Holy Scriptures have to say on the subject. Still, here are six specific truths, from the word of truth, about pornography use:

1) Pornography use is always wrong.

Like adultery, fornication, homosexuality, incest, bestiality and other forms of sexual immorality, the use of pornography, too, is sin.

1 Thessalonians 5:22 admonishes us to "abstain from every form of evil." As we will further develop in the subsequent "porn truths" below, porn use is evil. "Do not desire her beauty in your heart, nor let her capture you with her eyelids" (Prov. 6:25).

"Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality..." (Galatians 5:19).

When you use pornography, you engage "the deeds of the flesh" and grieve the Holy Spirit. "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30).

2) Married? Pornography use is adultery. Not married? Pornography use is fornication.

"[B]ut I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:28).

Husbands, I realize that you tell yourself, "I'd never cheat on my wife."

Using pornography?

You already have.

You also don't have much sense.

"The one who commits adultery with a woman is lacking sense; He who would destroy himself does it. Wounds and disgrace he will find, and his reproach will not be blotted out" (Prov. 6:32-33).

Using porn? Knock it off, repent and ask God's forgiveness. You're destroying yourself and your marriage.

"Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4).

Hear that, single guys? If you're using porn, you're committing fornication. You're sinning against God, your future wife and God's precious daughters featured in the images after which you lust.

Again, knock it off, repent and ask God's forgiveness. Then save yourself, from now on, for your wife. That's what your Creator both expects and demands.

3) Pornography use leads to death.

"But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" (James 1:14-15).

People often say that pornography use is a "victimless crime." Nonsense. Both the subjects of pornography, the men, women and children featured in it and objectified through it, as well as

those who consume it, are hurt by pornography.

Pornography use is a cancerous epidemic in America. It's destroying lives, souls, children, marriages and families.

It's also destroying our culture.

Porn use leads to death – spiritual, emotional, marital, familial and societal death.

4) Pornography use is demonic.

“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world” (1 John 2:16).

Porn use typifies all of this and more. Porn is “of the world.”

Scripture calls Satan the “prince of the world” and the “father of lies.”

Pornography, which is “from the world,” is the wicked, destructive, deceptive and deadly brainchild of the “prince of the world.”

“Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret” (Eph. 5:11-12).

5) You must flee pornography.

“Flee [sexual] immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body” (1 Cor. 6:18).

Flee pornography while you still can. You will be discovered. Many falsely believe that porn use is a personal, harmless

form of entertainment. They think that what they do, they do in secret. Nothing is done in secret. More often than not, your loved ones will discover you. As scripture warns: “[Y]ou may be sure that your sin will find you out.”

Either way, God knows.

6) You can be free from pornography use.

“No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it” (1 Cor. 10:13).

The way of escape is available in and through the person of Jesus Christ, His holy word, the Holy Spirit and the full armor of God:

“Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:13-18).

Try this: Every time you’re tempted to return to your computer for porn, pick up a Bible instead. Or go to .

Begin reading.

“How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word. With all my heart I have sought You; Do not let me wander from Your commandments” (Psalm 119:9-10).

I second the Apostle Peter's plea: "Dear friends, I urge you ... to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul" (1 Peter 2:11).

Even if you feel you cannot stop using pornography under your own power, you can stop under the power of the Holy Spirit. Ask Jesus—keep asking Jesus—and He *will* help you.

If you screw up, then stop, ask His forgiveness and then ask Him again for help.

Because a soul is a terrible thing to waste.

Matt Barber is founder and editor-in chief of . He is an author, columnist, cultural analyst and an attorney concentrating in constitutional law. Having retired as an undefeated heavyweight professional boxer, Matt has taken his fight from the ring to the culture war. (Follow Matt on Twitter: @jmattbarber).

What Cessationists Really Think About the Supernatural

As the pastor of a Primitive Baptist church, my friend Charles Carrin was an ardent cessationist and entrenched five-point Calvinist for many years. He subscribed—as all cessationists do—to what I believe to be an unbiblical view: that God by His own will “ceased” long ago to deal with His people in a direct manner supernaturally. No more supernatural healings. No visions. No direct revelation. None of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in operation.

Cessationists do believe in the supernatural occurrences in

Scripture, of course, but they have no expectation that God will intervene supernaturally today except, perhaps, through providence. But the notion of the gifts of the Spirit being in operation today, as in 1 Corinthians 12:10-12, is out of the question.

Even so, one day my Baptist friend prayed something like this: "Lord, I want to be filled with Your Holy Spirit, but I have three conditions: I don't want to shout, I don't want to be spectacular and I don't want to speak in tongues. Now, with that in mind, You may proceed."

Nothing happened.

As it turns out, he was also a chaplain at the federal prison in Atlanta. He was assigned to a man who had been converted and filled with the Holy Spirit after being imprisoned. Whereas Charles went weekly to minister to this man, the prisoner began to minister to Charles. It is one of the most amazing reversals of role I have come across.

Little by little Charles became hungry for God in a fresh way. After a long while he became willing to ask this prisoner to lay hands on him—with the prison guards watching. He invited the Holy Spirit to fall on him without any preconditions. He was filled with the Holy Spirit that day and was never to be the same again. He was eventually forced to resign his church.

Let's Be Fair With Cessationists

One should never underestimate our cessationist friends' love for God, Scripture, sound teaching and holy living. They are the salt of the earth. Some of them are among the greatest vanguards of Christian orthodoxy.

I repeat: They certainly do accept the miraculous in the Bible. They simply do not believe that God reveals Himself immediately and directly by revelation anymore. God, of course, could do it, they argue; He has simply and sovereignly

chosen not to show His power as He did in the earliest church.

The absence of power, therefore, to the cessationist is not owing to our unbelief, lack of faith or expectancy. God Himself decided that kind of power was for the earliest church. Any amount of praying, fasting, intercession and waiting on God will not bring about His power. You cannot twist God's arm to do what He decreed isn't going to happen.

Cessationists do not want to appear smug or unreachable; they simply don't believe the claims of charismatics and Pentecostals who have reportedly seen the miraculous. They are not questioning our honesty; they feel we have been either too optimistic, perhaps gullible, if not actually deceived.

Furthermore, cessationists understandably get turned off by flamboyant healing evangelists who make their extravagant claims. What causes some cessationists to dig in their heels is not only the lack of hard evidence, but also that the claims to healing miracles are so often surrounded with Hollywood-style showmanship and questionable teaching. These television evangelists sometimes appear like movie stars who love the attention.

What's more, those people who are said to be slain in the Spirit and fall backward are also supposedly healed. That is certainly the impression that is given. But when honest skeptics who want to get to the bottom of the claims go back to these same people to interview them, the results are often rather sobering. It often turns out that very few, if any, were actually healed. This scenario has been repeated again and again.

I can truly sympathize with cessationism. It seems to me the extravagant claims and lifestyles of many healing evangelists are far removed from the humility of the early apostles. I also find it disquieting when prominent healing evangelists absolutely forbid people in wheelchairs from being pushed to

the front of the auditorium before the services. Ushers are positively told not to let people in wheelchairs be positioned near the stage; it draws attention to them, especially when the handicapped people are not called out to be prayed for.

It wasn't always this way. In the years between 1949 to 1951, it was very different. I have good reason to believe that healings of crippled people actually took place then. People in wheelchairs were welcomed—and often healed. They often carried their own wheelchairs back to their cars. And they stayed healed.

I will tell you why I believe this. I have personally talked with three men (and others who knew them well) who were very prominent in the healing ministry in the 1950s. They have shown me photographs, letters and testimonies of people who wrote to them. I got close enough to some of these men to know they were not making things up.

What convinced me further is when they also admitted that the healings came to a halt. They were vulnerable to admit to this. It made me feel that the photographs and letters were genuine. But for some reason the miraculous healings diminished in the 1950s, although some of the evangelists did their best to keep praying for people as they had previously done—but with fewer results.

It's a Hypothesis, Not Dogma

Here is the ultimate truth about all this: Cessationism is a hypothesis. It is not a teaching grounded in Holy Scripture—like the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, the resurrection of Jesus and salvation by the blood of God's Son. Cessationists have *chosen* to believe God does not reveal Himself directly and immediately today.

I do think, however, that many cessationists would sincerely welcome supernatural healing if they actually saw a person healed or if they themselves were healed (should they become

willing to be prayed for) and remained healed. Most cessationists would be thrilled with a miracle, if indeed it was genuine and they had the undisputed facts before the healing and after the healing.

I know some cessationists become open to the miraculous when one of their own loved ones becomes seriously ill. God sometimes uses a critical illness to get our attention. I don't mean to be unfair, but there is nothing that changes the mindset of a cessationist like one's own fatal illness or the serious sickness of a loved one. That often makes them open in a way they would not have been before. General Douglas MacArthur used to say, "There are no atheists in foxholes." So, too, desperation is something God may use to give us a wake-up call.

But what would worry me is this: if cessationists would be disappointed if the irrefutable evidence of genuine healings came forth. It is surely not good if they turned the hypothesis of cessationism into a dogma and then would resent it if a person were miraculously healed. If only such people would uphold cessationism as plan B in the event God might intervene and show His undoubted power.

Perhaps It's for Our Good

Sometimes it actually happens—a cessationist is convinced of a miracle and changes his or her views. But not often. Why? I cannot be sure.

But I have my own hypothesis: to test the faith of those who actually see the miraculous but have to enjoy it in relative solitude without their friends being convinced. That solitude can become downright painful—when one's integrity is questioned and yet one knows for a fact what God did. It's like the earliest church being convinced of Jesus' resurrection, whether they saw the resurrected Christ or because of the immediate and direct witness of the Spirit. It

was so real to them and so foreign to others.

But what if God in some cases keeps some skeptics from seeing the miraculous even though it actually takes place? What if miracles are largely for those believers in God's family who have accepted the stigma of being "outside the camp" (Heb. 13:13)?

After all, why didn't the resurrected Christ appear to everybody on Easter Sunday? One might choose to argue that this would have been a reasonable thing to do if God truly wanted everybody to believe in His Son. Why did Jesus reveal Himself only to a few? Why didn't Jesus knock on Pontius Pilate's door on Easter morning and say, "Surprise!"? Why didn't Jesus go straight from the empty tomb to Herod's palace and say, "Bet you weren't expecting Me!" He appeared only to a few—those who were His faithful followers.

I also suspect that God sometimes allows just a little bit of doubt when it comes to the objective proof of the miraculous. This keeps us humbled. And sobered. Pastor Colin Dye of London's Kensington Temple has put it like this: "Miracles always leave room for doubt, as they were not intended to replace faith, only to reveal the heart. Also, the fact that Jesus' miracles in Galilee were not believed shows that the very best of them were not knock-down proofs for those who are hard of heart and unbelieving, and to reject their testimony is to bring greater judgment on those who witness them. Perhaps it is out of God's mercy that God is pleased sometimes to withhold them, at least until the time is right to bring to light the true state of people's hearts—to bring in the elect and to reveal the apostates."

Perhaps you and I need patience while our friends or loved ones are totally convinced "there's nothing to it" when it comes to the miraculous. After all, how could Peter prove that Jesus had ascended to the right hand of God on the Day of Pentecost? He couldn't. But he believed it. And all the rest

could do was to believe his word—or reject it.

Let the Spirit Vindicate Us

Jesus was “vindicated by the Spirit” (1 Tim. 3:16, NIV) in the days of His earthly ministry. This meant He got His approval through the Holy Spirit from the Father alone—not from people’s approval. It also referred to His followers who were drawn to Him in faith by the Holy Spirit.

Faith is a gift of God (Acts 13:48; Eph. 2:8-9). This means those who believed in Jesus had been drawn to Him by the Spirit (John 6:44). And Jesus’ vindication by the Holy Spirit continues to this day. Even though He is at the right hand of God and is highly exalted in heaven, the only ones who believe this are those whose hearts have been drawn to Him by the Holy Spirit.

My hypothesis, then, is that the principle of vindication by the Spirit is at stake when it comes to the miraculous. Vindication by the Spirit is an internal vindication. The Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts.

Furthermore, those who are faithful believers in Jesus’ power today are more likely to see His healing miracles than those who say, “I will believe it when I see it.” In other words, as Jesus appeared to those who were previously drawn to Him, it may be that God shows His manifest power to those who have previously believed He is willing to show His glory.

Could it be, then, that God withholds the lack of hard evidence to skeptical people for *our* sakes? If so, it becomes a rather huge testing for us. The issue is this: Will you and I still be faithful if our cessationist friends never see God’s manifest power for themselves? Many of us would so love to be openly vindicated. But what if God is behind the withholding of His manifest power to our critics in order that we get our vindication not from people’s approval but from the Father alone? This would mean that we, too, are vindicated by

the Spirit—His internal witness—and not by the external, visible and tangible proofs of His power.

God could show His healing power at any moment. For instance, a few years ago I received a curt letter from a very close friend. He lovingly chided me for my associations with Pentecostals and charismatics. But since he wrote me that letter, his own daughter became critically ill and was expected to die. The very charismatics he would not normally turn to prayed for his beloved daughter. She was gloriously healed. And stayed healed. My friend made a 180-degree turn. He announced to his friends, “I am a Baptist charismatic.”

But why doesn't God do that all the time? You tell me.

My point is simply this. Let us not live for the vindication of our theological views. God wants us to receive the praise that comes from Him alone (John 5:44). If we became openly vindicated of our position that God manifests His power and glory today through the gifts of the Spirit, we might succumb to the praise of people. We could. We all have fragile egos. God forbid that this should happen to us—that we would start saying, “I told you so.”

R.T. Kendall *was the pastor of Westminster Chapel in London from 1977 to 2002. He now lives in Nashville, Tenn. He is a well-known speaker and the author of many books, including his newest release, Holy Fire: A Balanced, Biblical Look at the Holy Spirit's Work in Our Lives, from which this article was excerpted.*

Israel: Freedom Knows No Borders

The shooting attack at the Jewish museum in Brussels last weekend was another example of the anti-Semitic wave that has been washing over Europe in recent years. This begs the question: Is the State of Israel gradually becoming the only refuge, or should we say ghetto, of the Jewish people?

Does our 2,000-year-old desire “to be a free people in our land, the land of Zion and Jerusalem” contradict our individual desires to be free Jews anywhere we wish?

“Auto-Emancipation,” an early Zionist pamphlet written in German by Russian-Polish Jewish doctor and activist Leo Pinsker in 1882, warns of the xenophobia toward Jews in Europe. Pinsker wrote that the Jews were a “dead but still living nation” or a “ghostlike apparition” with no homeland or independence, and that was why they appeared strange and foreign.

According to Pinsker, this was the root cause of what he called the “Judeophobia” that the Europeans had developed, leading to displays of anti-Semitism. Pinsker’s proposed remedy was “auto-emancipation,” the establishment of a Jewish state in which every citizen would receive the respect he or she deserved.

More than a century after Pinsker wrote his essay, Mira and Emanuel Riva, both Israeli citizens, were murdered in Brussels. A French woman was also killed in the attack, and a fourth man was critically wounded. The Rivas were tourists like any other tourists.

Tragically, the victims’ Israeli citizenship served to divert the focus away from the growing trend of anti-Semitism in Europe, and instead enabled the event to be attributed to

“anti-Israelism”—something that is actually politically correct to express in Europe.

“We have no complaints when it comes to the treatment we receive from the national institutions,” says Raphael Werner, the president of the Flemish Forum of Jewish Organizations. Werner, who traveled to Israel along with the heads of the Belgian Jewish community to take part in the Rivas’ funeral, talks about a comfortable, supportive relationship with the Belgian authorities. “But ... ,” he adds.

The “but” refers to the general atmosphere in the Belgian press, and to several pro-Palestinian remarks made by Belgian ministers. In this atmosphere, Syrian President Bashar Assad massacres his people and no one mentions it, but when the IDF clashes with Palestinians it is all over the newspapers.

In this atmosphere, activists who happen to be Jewish approach the Belgian education minister to discuss a specific problem in education and he asks them over and over about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is not trendy to be anti-Semitic, but being anti-Israel is very much in vogue these days.

Julien Klener, the president of the official Jewish umbrella organization Consistoire Central Israelite de Belgique, is concerned.

“When I read the papers, I see things that were not there three or four decades ago,” he says. Klener was born during World War II. He hid from the Nazis with his family, and after the war, he lived in a town where his family were the only Jews.

In the decades that followed, he heard few remarks about Jews. During that time everyone knew what had happened and refrained from talking ill of the Jews. Now, Klener is beginning to see those familiar terms in the newspapers again.

“The anti-Zionists use the same terminology once used against

the Jews," he says.

Those who can recall the fate of the ghettos know. The State of Israel must wage a war to the death for every Jew's right to live anywhere without fear.

For the original article, visit .

How to Minister a Word of Knowledge

When three Orlando, Florida, women recently set out for their favorite mall, they figured it would be just another shopping trip. And it was—until God invaded and changed their lives forever.

While the trio enjoyed lunch in the food court, two of them listened as their friend shared a dream she had the night before.

They were perplexed. Did the dream mean something? If it had a deeper meaning, what was it?

Nearby sat two Christians who were also talking about dreams. They turned to the three women. "Do any of you have a dream you want interpreted?" they asked.

The women looked at each other. One of them stammered, "Yes. In fact, we were just talking about it."

As the woman described her dream, the Christians silently prayed for God's wisdom and direction. When she finished, they offered her a spiritual interpretation of her dream as well as God's encouragement. The woman was so touched that she gave

her heart to Jesus, right there in the food court and in front of her friends.

Elsewhere in the mall that day, another group of Christians was walking and praying when they sensed the Holy Spirit pointing out a certain man. A thought arose in their spirits: *He's struggling with loneliness.*

They approached him and struck up a conversation. Within minutes, the man invited Jesus Christ into his heart.

Elated, the group moved on and found a woman they felt the Holy Spirit directing them toward. They interpreted a dream for her and then led her to the Lord.

A third group walking around the Orlando mall felt the sensation of electricity in their hands and interpreted it as a sign to pray for someone's healing. Upon seeing a woman with a withered hand and a limp, they approached her and were soon praying for her.

Suddenly, the woman's withered hand opened and her feet straightened! She was so excited that she accepted Jesus on the spot.

During that weekend in Orlando, 14 people came to know Jesus Christ, and several were healed. The Christians were members of our Dream Teams, individuals who have been trained by Streams Ministries International in dream interpretation and prophetic evangelism.

Last year, we sent a Dream Team to Salt Lake City for the Winter Olympics. In a Starbucks coffeehouse one night, two team members were chatting about dreams when they looked over at a group of about 30 people standing in line. "Does anyone have a dream they'd like to know more about?" one of them asked.

A news agency journalist joined them and recounted her dream.

When the team gave her the interpretation, she fell back in her chair, looked at her boyfriend and said, "Wow! Did you hear that?"

Others had gathered and for the next several hours, the team interpreted dreams. In fact, during their stay in Salt Lake City, our team members interpreted more than 150 dreams.

Real-life experiences like these have led me to the conclusion that prophetic evangelism—a reliance on listening to the Lord while sharing the gospel—is one key to the next great move of God in the world. Prophetic evangelism is a great way to grow the church and to introduce Jesus to your unsaved friends.

True Dreams Are From God

In the 1980s, my friend and pastor John Wimber, then leader of the Association of Vineyard Churches, coined the phrase "power evangelism." He focused on the usefulness of signs and wonders, especially miraculous healings, as a way to lead people to Jesus.

Prophetic evangelism is the next step in my understanding of Wimber's vision. During the last 20 years, tens of thousands have been saved through what he called power evangelism. I believe that trend will continue.

But I also know that dream interpretation, words of knowledge and prophetic words—prophetic evangelism, as I call it—will help even more people come to Jesus.

There is much scriptural foundation for this idea. God promised in Joel 2:28, "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions." When we read the conclusion of that passage, we find that the result of prophesying, dreams, visions, signs and wonders is to bring a harvest into the kingdom.

Though many churches have embraced the idea of Christians

prophesying, they have not been as accepting of biblical dream interpretation. That's unfortunate. The Bible teaches us that God speaks to us in the night.

Elihu confirms this in Job 33:14-16: "For God may speak in one way, or in another, yet man does not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls upon men, while slumbering on their beds, then He opens the ears of men, and seals their instruction."

Jeremiah and Zechariah criticized "false" dreams, because they knew the importance of "true" dreams from God (see Jer. 23:25; 27:9; Zech. 10:2).

Daniel 1:17 tells us, "Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams." The young prophet ends up prophesying to King Nebuchadnezzar concerning a dream he had.

The impact of the revelation was so powerful that the king exclaimed, "Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret" (Dan. 2:47).

Early church fathers and mothers readily accepted the validity of dreams as a way in which God speaks. First-century Jewish historian Philo said that dreams are a way God gave to mankind to learn about the spiritual world.

Tertullian of Carthage, who lived in the second century after Christ, said, "Almost the greater part of mankind derive their knowledge of God from dreams." Jerome, the fourth-century theologian who translated the first Latin Bible, the Vulgate, was converted to Christianity by a dream from God.

God has never stopped speaking to men and women who want to hear His voice. In fact, dreams are such a powerful means of communication that the enemy has tried everything in his power to discredit and counterfeit them.

Why do New Age practitioners have so little trouble with the idea of dreams, and why do Christians—the ones who long to hear God’s voice—devalue it? God created this connection between His Spirit and our spirit for a reason.

Spirit Communication

Biblical dream interpretation comes as the result of a growing relationship with God. A hunger for Him translates into a hunger to hear and understand His voice.

True dreams from God generate a curiosity in us, a question that we’re desperate to answer. We long to hear His voice.

Every night, God whispers into the dreams of unsaved men and women. He seals the truth within their hearts. Some will search the world looking for the key to unlock that truth. Many today are drawn to the New Age movement, thinking the answer might be there. Others may go to dream interpreters who operate in the perversions of Freudian and Jungian dream analysis, and they will find no peace.

Christians who hear and understand the voice of God hold the key for these wanderers. Prophetic evangelism is about giving a human voice to the spiritual mysteries God has implanted in the lost.

During my years of study, I have discovered that God will give the interpretation to a dream in any of four different ways:

- 1. God will speak the interpretation to our spirit in the dream.** We will awaken with the understanding of what the dream meant.
- 2. God instantly gives a dream’s meaning.** As with Daniel, the interpretation comes through an angelic messenger.
- 3. God gives the interpretation during the process of recording the dream.** First Chronicles 28:19 says, “‘All this,’ said David, ‘the Lord made me understand in writing, by His

hand upon me, all the works of these plans.'”

4. God gives us interpretations of dreams as we grow and mature in our understanding of His ways. Proverbs 25:2 says, “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter.” God wants us to meditate on His mysteries. He places great value on our searching for the spiritual truths and insights that He conceals like buried treasure.

Often, we learn as much, if not more, in the discovery process of interpreting a dream as we do in simply obtaining the dream’s answer itself. The more we learn, the hungrier we become.

It’s Him We Need

God will not remove our need for the Holy Spirit. It is through His wisdom that dreams are interpreted and that we commune with God.

Even though there are biblical guidelines for interpreting dreams, we need Him, not pat answers or fixed rules. We are truly dependent on Him to lead us into all truth. And to truly hear the Lord, we need His peace in our lives.

All revelation comes from the Holy Spirit, who searches the deep things of God. He chooses how He will give the revelation to us. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of peace, and when He comes, a residue of peace is left with us.

God uses metaphors and symbols in our dreams. He is a visual, creative entity, and He loves to wrap His wisdom in the mysteries of our language and culture. When we interpret a dream, we need to approach the metaphors in a dream from different points of view. Why did God choose to use this symbol? Why not another?

God is purposeful in everything He does. As you interpret more

dreams, you will begin to see patterns in how God uses certain symbols in your dreams.

People Are Wanting Truth

When I am in a situation with non-Christians, I ask God to show me if they are open to His Spirit or not. If they tell me a dream, that's a good sign they are indeed open to spiritual things.

The moment you open your heart to the possibility that God speaks through dreams, you will discover that many people near and dear to you have dreams and want an interpretation. As you begin to embrace the ways God speaks to you, He will speak to you even more.

I have interpreted more than 40,000 dreams in my life—from Christians and non-Christians. Not all were from God. Many were soul dreams, and some I've encountered were impossible to interpret.

I'm still learning every day about how God communicates this way and how dreams can be used prophetically to evangelize the lost. Compared to where God wants to take us in His Spirit, we're all little children. We have much to learn.

This is the hour for prophetic evangelism—for the light of God to shine on people who have waited for years for a resolution in their lives. This is a moment in history in which Christians can make a massive difference—one person and one dream at a time.

As Paul wrote, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Cor. 2:9). We are standing on the threshold of a new spiritual awakening.

I believe God is getting ready to unleash a powerful wave of prophetic evangelism, larger than any of us have ever dreamed. And with it will come a harvest that is unprecedented in

church history.

John Paul Jackson is the founder of Streams Ministries International (), a New Hampshire-based nonprofit organization that offers courses on hearing God and biblical dream interpretation.

The Secret to Holy Sexuality

No words in the English language could possibly describe the look of panic on my mom's face as she pulled into the driveway to witness 5-year-old me standing barefoot in the dew-covered grass, holding a fallen electrical line in my tiny hand. I'd been watching *Sesame Street* when suddenly the TV went dead, along with all of the lights in the house. I went outside to ask my dad to investigate but stumbled upon a potential explanation when I saw the severed black cord lying limp on the front lawn. So I picked it up, as if somehow I could reconnect it to its power source and restore everything to the way it was supposed to be—and amazingly, I lived to tell about it.

In many ways this article is my attempt to do something similar—to reconnect us, the body of Christ, to our original Power Source, particularly to restore energy, passion and creative freedom in the marriage bed. Hopefully I'll get better results this time (and avoid any shocked facial expressions in the process!).

Is there any real connection between our sexuality and spirituality? Is there a direct connection between our bodies and our spirits? What happens if we sever the connection God

intended through addiction or ignorance, or if it's severed through abuse or trauma inflicted upon us?

The Energy Equation

First, let's think of our spirit as being the energy we're given as humans who are made in the image of God. Let's think of our bodies as the conduit through which that energy flows. Without the conduit (the body), there would be no way for us to experience that energy and let it flow from ourselves to another human being. But without the energy (the spirit), our bodies alone can't muster the deep human connection we naturally crave.

Oh, many try. They find human outlets for their warped physical sexual desires, which can lead to manipulative seduction, child molestation, sexual abuse, sexual addiction, prostitution and human trafficking, to name just a few. It wears all kinds of ugly masks.

But sharing a physical connection with someone with whom we also share a strong spiritual and emotional bond—that's something else entirely. That's pure love, romance, passion, intimacy, ecstasy. When we're expressing our sexuality in the way our Designer intended, there is an enormous and undeniably powerful connection between our sexuality and our spirituality. Like two sides of the same coin, body and spirit are intertwined.

So, since we can't separate body from spirit or sexuality from spirituality, how about looking to see what we can learn from fully integrating and celebrating the synergy between the two?

A Most Shocking Question

"How is our relationship with God *sexual*?"

This was the question a professor posed to our small group in a human sexuality class at Liberty University. Translation:

What does our spiritual relationship with God have in common with our sexual relationship with our mate?

Here are just a few answers that surfaced during this lively discussion, as we discovered both relationships have deep levels of:

- Trust
- Full acceptance
- Closeness
- Openness
- Risk
- Purpose
- Euphoria
- Vulnerability
- Connection
- Honesty
- Intimacy
- Pleasure
- Completion
- Genuine interest
- True communion
- Life-giving transference
- Humility
- Passion
- Transcendence
- Synergy

Given that there are so many more possible answers to the question, perhaps there's a greater connection between spirituality and sexuality that we've ever fathomed!

When we pause to really ponder it, we have to admit it's quite fascinating that God would create us both in His image *and* as sexual beings—simultaneously. It's easy to wonder why God made us this way. Did He design sexuality as a burden or a blessing?

You be the judge. What else in all of creation can:

- Comfort you when you're sad?
- Calm you when you're anxious?
- Provide an outlet for expression when you're excited?
- Relieve boredom?
- Help you forget your current trials and tribulations?
- Make you sleep better?
- Provide intense, guilt-free pleasure?
- Help you feel deeply connected to another human being *and* to God?
- Erase feelings of loneliness and isolation?
- Give you an interesting break from your daily routine?
- Relieve stress and even certain aches and pains?
- Enhance your overall health and vitality?
- Fulfill your hopes and dreams of parenthood?
- Rev your engine, float your boat and light your fire?
- Send sparks through your brain and shivers down your spine?
- Make you feel so giddy, so special, so cherished and so celebrated?

Only sex can do all that—and it does all that quite well!

So, what was God thinking when He created sex? I believe He was thinking, "I'm going to make their day ... and their nights too!"

Seeing and Celebrating God

I also think God created sexual intimacy to provide us with a peek into His own character and nature. As we understand our sexuality more fully, we understand God more fully and vice versa. Here are a couple things we learn about God through our sexuality:

1) He gets giddy when He has our attention. A coaching client once asked me, "Why did God create us in such a way that we have physiological responses to our emotions? When I'm

attracted to someone, why do I get butterflies in my stomach, sweaty palms and a racing heart? Why do I get all giddy?"

At first I responded, "I have no idea!" But then it was like God opened my brain and poured the answer in, like liquid Drano to unclog my thoughts. He said, "Shannon, I created humans to respond to love like that so they'd know how I feel when they turn their hearts and attention toward Me."

I sat there, blown away, for a few seconds. When I shared the epiphany with my client, she was blown away too. The God of the universe gets giddy over us when we turn toward Him? Yes, He does. And He's given you a glimpse into that fact through the thoughts and feelings you have toward the object of your affection (your spouse).

2) He's giving us a foretaste of heaven. One day I was contemplating why God designed the human body to feel such intense pleasure when we experience the height of the sexual experience. Seriously, sex feels plenty good while it's happening, and it creates beautiful babies and bonds a couple in extraordinary ways. So why give us such a stunningly ripe cherry on top?

Just like a fun game of peek-a-boo, our heavenly Father gives us through this peak of pleasure just a glimpse of the "big finale" we face ahead in heaven.

I mean, let's think about it. Is there any moment in existence when we feel a more primordial delight, a greater loss of control (in a good way) or a greater sense of absolute euphoria than in those sacred moments of extreme, intense pleasure? I can't help but believe when Christ returns for us someday and ushers us into our heavenly home, the intensity of the heavenly pleasure we encounter is going to be even more mind-blowing and soul-stirring than the most amazing orgasmic experience we've ever had. The joy and delight of sexual intimacy is merely a foretaste of the intimacies and ecstasies

that await us there!

Letting Go of Sexual Legalism

While God intended our sexuality to be fully enjoyed in the context He provided, it's unfortunate that the church has historically focused on fear-inducing sex-negative messages instead of empowering sex-positive messages. As a result, many walk on sexual eggshells. Some Christians have even opted out of sexual intimacy for the most part. They fear displeasing God with any sexual thought, feeling or action.

But does a married couple thoroughly enjoying sex without any guilt, shame or inhibition displease God? Does He roll His eyes in disgust? Absolutely not! I believe a couple delighting in the gift of one another's bodies brings our heavenly Father great joy, like a parent watching a beloved child excitedly open presents on Christmas morning.

Do you know what *does* upset God? The same thing that upset Jesus: legalistic religious people putting words in God's mouth and spiritual burdens on people's backs that He never meant for them to carry.

While I can't speak directly for God or Jesus, I, too, get pretty upset when I hear things from within the Christian community that sound a little something like sexual legalism—things such as “Women shouldn't wear sexy lingerie for their husbands or else it will awaken their appetite to look at pornography” or “The missionary position is the only holy way for a married couple to have sex” or “Oral sex is animalistic behavior” or “A man shouldn't expect his wife to have sex more than once a week or else she'll feel put upon.” When I hear comments such as these, I can't help but think, *Wow! I don't recall reading that anywhere in my Bible!*

These views and sentiments may be well-intentioned and may come from very sincere Christians who deeply love the Lord, but one can be truly sincere yet still sincerely wrong. I

believe this might be one of the reasons the world doesn't look to the church as a source of real wisdom when it comes to sexual matters.

If we are ever going to re-establish Christians as authorities on the topic of healthy sexuality, we must move beyond our sexual and religious baggage, study Scripture carefully and proclaim that a married couple's chosen sexual repertoire is entirely between the husband, the wife and God. Barring any sexual activities specifically forbidden in Scripture (such as adultery or prostitution), there is complete freedom in the marriage bed to mutually experiment, explore and enjoy all of the many wonders of human sexuality.

The Power of a Clean Slate

My guess is that some are reading this and thinking, *How can sex be a sacred activity when it's the motivation behind so much evil in the world?*

I can understand that concern. It's true that sex used for any purpose other than marital bonding is incredibly degrading and destructive. Some of us have been victims of rape or other forms of sexual abuse. Others of us have been harmed by the proliferation of pornography in our image-driven society, perhaps learning of a spouse's addiction and feeling at a loss and to blame for their addiction in some way.

Let me say this: *You are not to blame for someone else's sexual wrongdoing.* The other person is responsible before God for their actions, and they are also responsible for taking the appropriate actions to be made well. God's real heart toward you is to heal you for the ways another person's actions did you harm. I urge you to seek shelter in the comforting arms of the God who loves and cherishes everything about you and longs for you to experience your sexuality in the whole and fulfilling way He intended for you.

What about those of us who weren't victims of another person's

cruelty but rather players in a story not reflective of God's best? Premarital sexual activity, for instance, can do a lot of relational damage, and that damage often doesn't surface until long after the honeymoon phase is over. Many Christians bemoan the fact that they still struggle with guilt over premarital sexual involvement years or even decades later or that they still hold a grudge against their spouse because they feel they were manipulated, coerced or taken advantage of while dating.

If that's you, you can begin the sexual healing process by initiating two small steps:

- 1) Take responsibility for your part in the dance of sexual dysfunction.
- 2) Start with a clean slate by forgiving yourself and your mate completely.

During one of my Women at the Well intensive workshops, a wife was mourning the loss of her virginity prior to marriage. Eventually, I compassionately asked, "Did he hold a gun to your head?"

She was shocked at the question but sat with it just long enough for something to click in her brain. The hard lines on her face melted as she looked me and courageously declared, "No. No, he didn't."

I could tell it was a much-needed "Aha!" moment for her, as I thought she might stand up afterward and shout, "Hooray! I don't have to play the victim anymore!" In truth, the responsibility was on *both* their shoulders, not just his. She could have said no just as easily as he could have.

Unless we are being forcefully raped, we always have a say in the matter. Perhaps we said no with our words but our reciprocal and responsive actions spoke louder in the heat of the moment. We must own up to the power we willingly surrendered and give up the victim mentality. It serves no

good purpose.

When we recognize we weren't victims but rather initially reluctant yet ultimately willing partners, forgiveness is no longer a one-way street. It becomes a two-lane highway.

It's amazing how much easier it is to forgive another person when we realize how much we ourselves are in need of forgiveness for the exact same infraction. Throwing a stone isn't something we're as eager to do when we realize just how much we belong in the middle of the stone-throwing circle.

The Power of Prayer

If there's such a powerful connection between our sexuality and our spirituality, perhaps investing a little more spiritual energy in preparing for sexual encounters is a wise move.

Would you like to guess what my husband and I have found to be the *best* aphrodisiac available? Prayer! When we snuggle up together and hold each other, then pour out our hearts to God on behalf of one another, it creates such an intense bond. In fact, it's sometimes impossible to just roll over and go to sleep. We can't help but want to follow the "Amen" with a whole lot of good lovin'!

Go ahead—give it a try tonight, and see if drawing closer to God doesn't draw you incredibly closer to one another!

Shannon Ethridge is a best-selling author, speaker and certified life coach with a master's degree in counseling and human relations from Liberty University. She's spoken to college students and adults since 1989 and is the author of 21 books, including the million-copy best-selling *Every Woman's Battle* series and her latest, *The Passion Principles*.

Watch Shannon Ethridge explain why God made you a sexual being and how to embrace His divine purpose for this at

13 Modern Challenges to Awakening and Revival

This past week I had a private dinner with a prominent African bishop who was involved in a mighty national awakening in Uganda. This dinner, and the fact that last week was the National Day of Prayer in the United States, made me think of the subject of **revival**, awakening and how it could happen again in my nation.

Along these lines I have spoken to many who believe that global economic and political conditions will continue to deteriorate; because of this, many are receiving a great burden to pray for a global awakening.

As I have spent much time reading the accounts of the First, Second and Third Great Awakenings in the United States, the 20th-century Azusa Street Revival, and renewal outbreaks such as the Latter-Rain Movement of the late 1940s, charismatic movement of the 1960s and '70s, and some smaller renewal movements emanating out of local congregations (Toronto Airport; Pensacola, Florida; etc.), I have come to conclusions regarding some of the greatest cultural, societal hindrances to seeing a major outbreak of awakening (as opposed to a localized congregational awakening) akin to what the United States experienced through Whitefield, Wesley, Edwards, Finney and the like.

Furthermore, there have been mighty revivals and awakenings in various parts of the Global South (Africa, China, Indonesia and Latin America) that have trumped any of the aforementioned movements. Because of this, I have asked myself many times: Why hasn't anything like this happened recently in North America or Western Europe?

Truly, culture trumps the anointing and can even nullify the Word of God (read Mark 7:13). That is to say, there are presently major cultural hindrances and challenges to seeing the same kind of awakening the United States experienced in the 18th and 19th centuries. We either have to find solutions to overcome these cultural challenges or we have to ask God for another way to penetrate the culture in a more subtle fashion. Either way, we cannot just continue on the same path, expecting a national awakening without addressing some of these pressing issues.

The following are some of my thoughts regarding challenges to national awakening:

1. The fragmentation of face-to-face contact due to social media.

People are simply not engaging in much face-to-face contact anymore. They are connecting via text, Facebook, Twitter and other forms of online social networking. This is hindering the ability of the gospel to effectively gain the attention and focus of young people (and older people as well) because our thought processes are inundated with trivial and often destructive social interaction, as well as internet pornography, video gaming and other things that sap spiritual life and energy from a generation of people!

Consequently, kids are not as socially skilled as previous generations and are not as inclined to spend time studying, reading books, hearing sermons and thinking of things deep and enduring. (Of course, there are many exceptions to this among

our young people.)

2. The independent rather than communal mindset of American culture.

As I hear stories about the revivals in South Korea, China, Africa, Columbia and the like, I can't help but think these nations have less cultural challenges than we do here in the USA. These cultures have a more communal mindset, in which they would tend to conform to the norms placed before them by a strong leader and/or a group of people, as opposed to the mindset of rugged individualism in America, which has been accentuated and made worse by the advance of technology.

Thus, it is harder to get the typical American to hold to the structure of attending a small group, getting up to pray at 5 a.m. every day, attending church services five nights a week, following a set of goals for evangelism, etc. This is why church growth and evangelism strategies, like G12, have not worked in America. (Not even the founder of G12 has experienced massive church growth and success launching a local church in Miami as he did in Bogotá, Columbia!)

We in America have to find strategies that work in the context of our own culture, not just imitate strategies that are effective in communal cultures and contexts.

3. The lack of geographic cohesion in modern cities.

The days of Finney, Wesley, Edwards, and Whitefield preceded the Industrial Revolution, when men and women left their rural farm communities to secure jobs in cities. Thus, in those days, the average person never traveled far from home, had the same 15 friends from the cradle to the grave, lived with or in proximity to their family, and had nothing to do at night but get together with the rest of their community for socials like dancing, card playing, etc.

Thus, when an evangelist like Finney held a revival meeting the whole community came out every night for weeks. Both the Holy Spirit and the evangelist had the undivided attention of a whole community, resulting in mass revival which eventually spread to the whole region.

Nowadays people do not associate their lives with their communities or even their block. Thus we are not connected to the lives of our neighbors but have divergent interests. This means that we could live on the same block as another person for decades in a city like New York yet never know their name!

In this kind of social disconnect a church could have a meeting across the street from their neighbors yet have a very difficult time getting everyone on their block to attend the meeting. The effect of the gospel is diluted.

Also, churches are not often community-centric but often have attendees who travel from different communities in their region. This fragmentation results in a lack of cohesion and is a huge challenge to community-wide revivals and awakenings.

For several years during the beginning of my evangelistic ministry in 1980 we were able to break down these barriers in my community because we would close off whole blocks and show gospel movies like *The Cross and the Switchblade*. The result was a Finney-like revival; we would see many people living on the same city block come to Christ! It was like something out of a history book: We would show the movie, I would preach an evangelistic message for 15 minutes, have an altar call for salvation, and 50-70 people who lived on the same block would make a decision for Christ.

We saw great revival and recommended people to many different churches because our mother church was far away. Of course, this was before the advent of home videos, computers, the Internet, etc. Thus, it would be much more difficult in today's world to get everyone on a city block to be interested

in seeing a movie—especially low-budget Christian films with B actors.

4. The amount of distractions and numerous options.

During the revivals of the 18th and 19th centuries people had few options in regards to transportation, technology, education and financially. Thus, when a church opened in a community it became not only the spiritual center but also the social and cultural center of all the people, even the unbelievers. (For example, Charles Finney was a member of the church choir in his community even while he was a staunch unbeliever.) Thus, when God moved upon a church it automatically affected the atmosphere of its community and region!

Nowadays, people have televisions, radios, computers, bowling, movies, sports, the gym, martial arts, etc. Too many options results in less social and community cohesion and less attention to give God and church.

5. The affluence of American/Western churches and believers.

In my studies of revival and national revivals, it seems they were always preceded by social and cultural disorientation. Very rarely, if ever, was a people group open to the gospel when they were financially affluent with a stable government.

The present economic, cultural and political warfare and disorientation we are experiencing in the USA may be the greatest gift to those who are looking for a way for God to break through and awaken this nation! It may not only be a sign of God's judgment but of God's love that things seem to be getting worse for the average American and global citizen. God is longing for people to call upon His name for deliverance, but many won't if they remain comfortable with their lives.

6. The lack of expectant faith for miracles and the reduction of Christianity to pragmatism.

Many—if not most—evangelical and Pentecostal churches have only a lukewarm commitment to seeing the power of God operate in their midst. Even in Pentecostal churches rare is the evidence of the gifts of the Spirit and healing power of God in both the church services and in people's lives.

American and Western Christianity is acquiescing more and more to the naturalistic/pragmatic mindset of its culture, devolving into churches that offer nice programs and therapeutic messages run by corporate style church governments and systems. In most cases the simplicity and power of the gospel has been replaced by this pragmatism and naturalism.

Thus, the average pastor and church attendee is expected to stay home when they are sick instead of going to church to get healed (read James 5:13-15), and is just as likely to depend on natural remedies to cure their physiological, emotional and physical maladies as their unbelieving neighbors. The expectation for God to break forth and heal, deliver and perform miracles is largely absent from Western churches. We need to recapture the awe, majesty and mystery of God again in our churches!

7. The lack of preaching on the law of God and the Ten Commandments.

Many pastors and churches have neglected the Old Testament, the Ten Commandments and the moral law of God in their preaching and teaching. The result is little if any conviction of sin, resulting in many emotional decisions for Christ but few real conversions.

Pastors need to preach the moral law of God again because through the law is the knowledge of sin (Rom. 7:7) as it serves as a schoolmaster that leads us to Christ (Gal. 3:24). When both society and the church have abandoned the Ten

Commandments less people will be convicted of sin or even know they need a savior, resulting in a huge hindrance for biblical awakening and revival.

8. The lack of preaching on heaven, hell and eternity.

When was the last time your pastor preached a message on hell? Enough said. (Read Matt. 3:7; Luke 16:19-31.)

9. The lack of the fear of the Lord in our churches.

Nowadays it is very common for evangelical church attendees to live together in sin, engage in pre-marital sex, engage in drunkenness, dance at night clubs, post lewd pictures on Facebook, use foul language, and listen to ungodly music—all in the name of grace and as a response against excessive legalism.

Even worse, there is no accountability in the church. Those who live like this are allowed to serve as ministers and leaders! The Bible teaches us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 9:10). Proverbs describes the fear of the Lord as the hatred of sin (Prov. 8:13). With so many Christians and leaders living continually on the edge or diving into a life of sin in the name of exploring their grace in humanity, it is a huge hindrance for a real move of God because such behavior grieves rather than attracts the Holy Spirit (read Eph. 4:29-5:10).

10. The lack of personal, family and congregational prayer and seeking of God

While most Christians are decrying atheist Madalyn Murray O'Hair for successfully taking prayer out of public schools in the early 1960s, we must admit that prayer was taken out of Christian homes way before that happened. Few are the believers I know, even conservative activist believers, who have erected a family altar in their homes and are seeking God

regularly with their spouses and their children.

Furthermore, I have heard for the past 20 years that surveys have shown the average pastor only prays about 22 minutes per day! How can we expect an earth-shattering revival if the leaders of our congregations are not even seeking God! (For more on this read *Why Revival Tarries* by Leonard Ravenhill.)

11. The lack of concerted, continual, united prayer among pastors and churches.

One of the things I remember reading regarding the revivals of the First and Second Great Awakenings in America was the importance of united prayer amongst the churches in each community. Jonathan Edwards started the Concert in Prayer movement that spread to America and greatly impacted England. Finney would get pastors and congregations in each community to pray before and while he commenced with revival services in their areas.

Sustained, continual united prayer in one congregation can result in a great revival in that church, impacting their immediate parish. But for a city or region to be affected there needs to be a commitment by pastors to engage in united prayer with their pastoral colleagues serving as co-laborers.

12. The fragmentation of knowledge that subverts the biblical worldview.

With all the information available today on the Internet—from alternate religions, philosophy, atheism, postmodernism, modernism, New Age movement, etc.—it is harder and harder to have an awakening among a people in a community or city because, in the days of the First and Second Great Awakenings, even unbelievers had a biblical worldview! For example, read the writings of Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, both deists in their faith, and you will see men with a strong Judeo/Christian mindset even though they were unbelievers!

Up until the time of the so-called Enlightenment, Christian theologians like Aquinas thought it very possible to unite all knowledge in the world under one unified biblical worldview. But the more they studied philosophy and the different world religions the more they realized what a hard task that was going to be! How much harder (but not impossible) is it today to see whole communities (especially in educated, urban regions) experience an awakening because the average person with an internet connection has access to millions of books, articles and information on any subject. Thus, everyone thinks they are experts; the days when the clergy were not only the most spiritual, but the most educated and knowledgeable people in a community are long gone!

I still believe the biblical worldview is the most cohesive view, and the only view that makes rational sense of the world. But to get that across even in my own neighborhood amongst all the residents is a huge challenge today because of this fragmentation of knowledge!

13. The gospel is not permeating the elite systems and people of culture.

Present-day global revivals are primarily (but not exclusively) taking place amongst the poorest and uneducated nations of the world. For example, the greatest awakenings during the past 50 years have taken place in developing areas like Africa, China and Latin America in the midst of great economic and political turmoil which made the average person very open to God's saving power! (Although during the past 10 years many young college intellectuals in China are getting saved!)

In the USA, the greatest revivals resulting in societal change and reformation took place when folks like Oxford educated Wesley and Whitefield, Yale graduate Jonathan Edwards, and Finney, a trained lawyer, preached and reached not only masses of uneducated poor people but also the elite in their cities.

In the Rochester revival of the 1830's (which was the closest thing to America ever having a whole major city come to God) Finney started revival meetings by first reaching lawyers, doctors, judges and those with the most cultural esteem and influence. This made it easier to reach masses of people!

For us to experience a national revival we either need to have mass disorientation or we need to reach the cultural elites in the arts, music, science, education, law, and politics—not only masses of poor people who have no influence to bring systemic change to culture. Usually only a Marxist-type movement (for example, Occupy Wall Street) with a groundswell of masses of people who use violence to bring chaos and overthrow governments are successful in bringing real change, even though their change is demonic! Thus, if we want to see not only awakening and revival but a lasting reformation that will change our ungodly laws and culture then we also need to reach the elites, not only masses of people through typical evangelistic campaigns. (For more on this read my article “Why the Church Needs Cultural and Political Access to Bring Transformation.”)

In closing, I did not write this article to discourage anyone from praying for revival but to get all of us to seriously think through the issues and not just simplify everything by using the same methods employed in other nations and/or in other eras of this nation's history and expect the same results. I still pray much for revival and reformation, but I also know that culture, societal structures and norms have to be understood before we can have the strategies necessary to bring long-term systemic change and experience earth-shattering revivals and awakenings in our nations.

Of course, God was able to use a foreigner like Philip to shake up a whole city (read Acts 8). In the 1950s God used

American evangelist Tommy Hicks to shake up the nation of Argentina by moving in extraordinary signs and wonders, which is still having an impact today. (Read *Cry for Me Argentina* by R. Edward Miller for an astonishing account of this awakening.) But this Argentinean revival was preceded by at least 3-5 years of intense, focused, deep, united intercessory prayer led by Dr. Miller and others in his circle. (See point 11 above.)

Even so, let's be humble before God and understand the times in which we live (1 Chr. 12:32) so that when we seek Him, He will give us the wisdom to know how we can have the greatest impact upon our communities, cities, nation and the nations of the world!

As I end this article I think perhaps we should ask ourselves the following questions regarding awakening for the sake of clarity and practicality:

- Do I strongly desire revival, awakening and reformation, or am I content with things in this world as they are?
- Am I personally hindering revival in my church and city?
- Am I seeking the Lord or merely praying perfunctory prayers for awakening?
- Am I open to God for His divine strategies when I pray for revival or do I have preconceived ideas regarding how I think God should bring it about?
- Am I trying to copy old methods for awakening that are no longer relevant?
- Are there new strategies that have never been used before that the church should employ for revival?
- Does our nation have to experience a societal breakdown before people will be open to God?
- Instead of a massive, spontaneous revival like in the past, is it rather God's will in developed countries for churches to employ strategies of gradual, multi-generational, societal penetration in every level of society for reformation and transformation?

- Am I preaching the whole counsel of God that can awaken sinners and convict compromised saints?

Joseph Mattera is overseeing bishop of Resurrection Church, Christ Covenant Coalition, in Brooklyn, N.Y.

WATCH: ‘Left Behind’ Trailer Shows Post-Rapture Chaos

The first teaser trailer for the *Left Behind* remake coming to theaters this fall was released Friday, offering a glimpse at the reboot of the book and film series.

The one-minute trailer shows Nicolas Cage as pilot Rayford Steele and Chad Michael Murray as journalist Buck Williams, along with the confusion and destruction that follows the rapture.

Watch the trailer below.