

Why Some Believers Wrongly Embrace Unbiblical Revival Experiences

Christians can embrace one of two extremes concerning the word “revival.” At one extreme are those who embrace pure emotionalism and hysteria—“if it’s odd it’s God.” At this church, and all weird behavior is excused.

The other extreme lacks a living, vibrant spiritual life. The church feels dead, cold and lifeless. Talk of reviving the things of God (revival) is either dismissed or ridiculed.

Both extremes can hinder the work of the Holy Spirit and genuine Christian growth. I am primarily addressing the first extreme.

Sadly, some of the leaders of these movements are rarely challenged. They can divorce their spouse and remain in leadership using 1 Chronicles 16:22 as a proof text, “Do not touch My anointed ones, and do My prophets no harm.” This is an abuse of grace at the highest level, and a twisting of Scripture.

We should forgive, but reinstatement raises several questions. In our zeal to defend the Holy Spirit, we sometimes run the risk of defending wrong behavior. One can rise to the top because of ability, but plummet to the bottom because they lack character.

To counter this criticism, some of the followers of this movement say that those who oppose them will suffer the judgment of God. But a person is not judged for seeking discernment; they are judged for rejecting the truth (Rom. 1:18).

Although some well-intentioned Christians are anxious to hear from God (thank God for that), many seek signs and wonders rather than seeking the Lord. We can become unstable, confused and deceived when spirituality hinges only on signs, wonders and manifestations. Instead, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and everything else will fall in place (Matt. 6:33).

Please understand, it's not my intention to paint experience-oriented movements with a broad brush—God wants us to experience Him. The presence and the power of the Holy Spirit can provoke overwhelming feelings, and rightly so.

When truth penetrates the heart, excitement, passion and enthusiasm often follow. These emotions can be good and God-given. My goal is not to limit the gifts, power and presence of the Spirit, but to seek balance and discernment. God often requires obedience whether we feel it or not.

One of the reasons why people embrace unbiblical experiences is because they are not in the Word seeking balance, confirmation and discernment. Simply stated, if we are not in the Word, the Word will not be in us. We can easily be deceived.

Searching for spiritual fulfillment isn't wrong, but where we search can be. Spiritual hunger is good, yet we can be so hungry spiritually that we'll consume anything.

Eagerness to consume can lead to experience-oriented movements with no Scriptural basis, especially when we begin to look to experiences to validate truth. Conversely, your pastor may not be a motivational speaker, the worship may not always descend from the portals of heaven, and you may not "feel" something at every event, but that does not mean that God is not moving.

Some of the events where oddities occur can feed sinful desires rather than challenge them. Granted, there are those who attend these events who are truly seeking God. I'm not

minimizing that. I applaud them for seeking, but the “signs and wonders” gospel is not the real gospel, nor is the “prosperity gospel” the real gospel. God may prosper us, and miracles do happen, but these are secondary—Christ is primary.

Granted, Christians can look odd to the culture, and revivals are not predictable, but this is not what I’m referring to. Again, I’m referring to bizarre occurrences such as people appearing drunk at the pulpit, toking the Holy Ghost, acting like animals, and screaming as if they were on fire. Can we honestly believe that Jesus, Peter and Paul would endorse, or worse yet, partake in weird behavior? Would godly men and women be led around like dogs on a leash, run around jerking and acting as if they are on fire, or slur as if drunk while speaking?

We should be concerned about actions and reputation, as well as having sincere faith. We all sin and fall short, but the important question to ask is what is the condition of the heart—is there true repentance and a belief in Christ as Lord and Savior, or are we trusting in experiences?

The apostle Paul warns against false professions of faith. He also warns against confusing and immature behavior that compromises the gospel. Falsehood and confusion often go hand-in-hand. Paul often corrected errancy in his epistles, and in 1 Corinthians 14:40 he concludes, “Let all things be done decently and in order.” Rather than quenching and grieving the Spirit, Paul is pleading for sound action, and for decency and order within the church when possible. The church is to be “the pillar and foundation of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15).

There are incidences of odd behavior in the Bible, such as the man from the country of the Gadarenes who was possessed, but after He met Jesus he was “sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind” (Luke 8:35). We also have an account of a man who brought his possessed son to Jesus: “And as he was still coming, the demon threw him down and convulsed

him. Then Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the child, and gave him back to his father” (Luke 9:42).

In these cases, very odd behavior is the result of people needing Christ. His presence and deliverance brings peace and order.

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