

2 Big Reasons for the Declension of the Power of God

Smith Wigglesworth spoke prophetically decades ago before he died and said that the greatest move of God would be in the 1980s, when solid teaching of the Word would be combined with the gifts and the move of the Holy Spirit. He knew he wouldn't live to see it, but the younger generation would. I cut my teeth on that move of God and personally benefited greatly from it and enjoyed it while it lasted. That move of the Word and the Spirit laid a solid foundation in both my wife and me that we have carried these many years.

We were also privileged to be a part of a very fruitful Word and Spirit missionary movement in West Africa that took us into three different countries before transitioning in the '90s back to America. Here in our own homeland, we were privileged once again to be a part of a great outpouring known now historically as the Brownsville revival (1995-2000). In a five-year period, 4 million visitors came from around the world to that revival, with 150,000 experiencing first-time salvation. We were part of the faculty of senior leaders of the Bible school that spawned from that revival. There, we helped to establish students in the Word of God and their ministry callings.

Since that era, however, I have witnessed a declension in both the Word of truth and the Spirit of truth in many churches. It's not the same. Something is lacking. What should have continued to grow in might and strength has actually declined. What has happened to cause this declension and diminishing of both the Word and the Spirit? Mainly two things.

First Reason for Declension

First, the lack of prayer and the lack of power has resulted in fewer conversions and the decline of church attendance. To offset this, church leadership has created a new church model.

This newer model was largely shaped by such men as Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Community Church near Chicago and Rick Warren of Saddleback Valley Community Church, south of Los Angeles. Their influence is stunning. For example, years ago Willow Creek formed its own association of churches, about 9,500 of them, with 100,000 church leaders attending at least one conference. In its beginnings, more than 250,000 pastors and church leaders from over 125 countries also attended Rick Warren's Purpose Driven Church seminars, and more than 60,000 pastors initially subscribed to his weekly email newsletter. Those numbers may be much higher now, just to give you an idea of the scope of the influence of just these two men and this new church model.

This new church model has bred multitudes of churches called "seeker friendly" or "seeker awareness." Their main philosophy is evangelizing through application of the latest marketing techniques. Typically, it begins with a survey of the lost or unchurched. This survey questions the unchurched about the things that interest them and offers things that would motivate them to attend a church. Results of the questionnaire indicate areas of potential changes in the church's operations and services that would be effective in order to attract the unchurched, keep them attending and win them to Christ. Those who have developed this marketing approach guarantee the growth of churches that diligently follow their proven methods. As far as numbers, this method is working, as many churches are exploding with growth. But is it biblically based, or is it a gross compromise of the real gospel? (See my book, *The Real Gospel*.)

Though it is noble and praiseworthy to reach more people for Christ, let me show you why the means and methods are clearly corrupted. As a result, the end must be corrupted also. Let's

begin with marketing as a tactic for reaching the lost.

Fundamentally, marketing has to do with profiling consumers, identifying what their “felt needs” are (by the way, this has been the No. 1 reason publishers have rejected most of my books—not a “felt need”), and then fashioning one’s product (or its image) to appeal to the targeted customer’s desires. The desired result is that the consumer buys into the product. George Barna, whom *Christianity Today* calls “the church’s guru of growth,” claims such an approach is essential for the church in our market-driven society. Evangelical church growth leaders are convinced that the marketing approach can be implemented without compromising the gospel. I’m afraid that this has been a great deception, and in my own humble opinion, the No. 1 reason for the declension and diminishing of the power of God in many of our churches.

A.B. McMahon explains it so well:

First of all, the gospel and the person of Jesus Christ are not “products” to be “sold.” They cannot be refashioned or image-adjusted to appeal to the felt needs of our consumer-happy culture. Any attempt to do so compromises to some degree the truth of who Christ is and what He has done for us. For example, if the lost are considered consumers and a basic marketing “commandment” says that the customer must reign supreme, then whatever may be offensive to the lost must be discarded, revamped or downplayed. Scripture tells us clearly that the message of the Cross is “foolishness to them that are perishing” and that Christ himself is a “rock of offense” (see 1 Cor:1:18; 1 Pet. 2:8). Some seeker-friendly churches, therefore, seek to avoid this “negative aspect” of the gospel by making the temporal benefits of becoming a Christian their chief selling point. Although that appeals to our gratification-oriented generation, it is neither the gospel nor the goal of a believer’s life in Christ.

Truth be told, this new model is now a monster that is breeding a second-generation semi-believer who lacks passion for God and discernment in the things of the Spirit, and is unskilled in the word of righteousness.

This is the sad result of man flexing his own muscles and building churches with the strength of the arm of flesh. We have been wise in our own conceits and placed our trust in man's wisdom and ability.

Secondly, if you want to attract the lost on the basis of what might interest them, for the most part you will be appealing to and accommodating their flesh. Wittingly or unwittingly, that seems to be the standard operating procedure of seeker-friendly churches. They mimic what's popular in our culture: top 40 and performance-style music, theatrical productions, stimulating multi-media presentations and 30 minutes or fewer of positive messages. The latter, more often than not, are topical, therapeutic and centered on self-fulfillment and how the Lord can meet one's needs and help solve one's problems.

What I have just described at length is the product of man's own wisdom, and the first reason for the declension and diminishing of both the Word of truth and the Spirit of truth.

Second Reason for Declension

Lack of solid biblically based teaching of the Word of God and accurate demonstrations of the Spirit of God have created a void for people to chase spiritual experiences, thrills and sensationalism outside of the real truth. In our travels, we see much of this. Many who are weak in the foundations of the Word are hungry for an experience. That is a risky combination, as it leads to chasing mystical things and the false prophetic.

Some examples would be the obsession with receiving personal prophecy, the abuse of the laying on of hands for everything—for faith, for financial breakthrough, for

deliverance, to impart ministry anointing; the gross overemphasis on warfare and deliverance and so forth. Many of these blessings come through the Word, personal disciplines to walk in the Spirit and not fulfill the lusts of the flesh, and praying and being led by the Spirit of God. People need to be taught these things.

You can't lay hands on people for everything. And personal prophecy is not the main way you receive from God. Even misguided pastors fall into the trap of either being too heavy handed and restrictive in their leadership style, which will also cause its own set of problems, or being too loose and letting things be a free-for-all.

Good shepherds are good gatekeepers, and they watch at the gate of people's lives for thieves who would steal, kill and destroy them. Good shepherds warn their people of wolves in sheep's clothing that would destroy the sheep. They warn their people of false teachings that will make them spiritually sick. The primary way they do this is by teaching and demonstrating the truth—the same way bank tellers can spot a counterfeit bill by being so familiar with the real. This is also the reason God has given us the Ephesians 4:11 ministry gifts—so spiritual children won't be “tossed here and there by waves and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the trickery of men” (Eph. 4:14). Good shepherds are like good parents who watch what comes into their children's lives through their associations and lifestyles.

I'm also finding a growing number of older Christians who are not really grounded in the Word of God. They are like those the Word describes who ought to be teachers by now, but have become “dull of hearing” and need someone to teach them again the first principles of the oracles of God (Heb. 5:11-12). Oh, some can quote the Word, and rejoice about the Word, nod their heads and shout amen at the preaching of the Word, but they are spiritual babies who have need of milk and cannot handle solid food yet.

The true anointing of the Spirit must be your teacher, for it is a day and an hour where many are being led astray. Foundational things must be taught to solidify people's lives. Knowing the Word, learning the true anointing and being led by the Spirit must become the emphasis. Understanding your personal authority as a believer, walking in faith and love, learning to enter into the prayer life by putting on the armor of God should be a high priority for every saint. These foundations should never get old, but need to be rehearsed and renewed regularly. Even as athletes or musicians or other occupational workers must continually practice the fundamentals of what they do, so should the earnest Christian do.

Through a process of time, hearkening to this practical instruction will turn the tide again and cause a groundswell of power and effectiveness in the life of the church that will once again distinguish it from the false and carnal church.

We've lost spiritual ground that needs to be recovered and pass it on to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also (see my book, *Passing on the Move of God to the Next Generation*).