

Where Is the Fear of God?

Many of us yearn for a return to the supernatural glory of the early church—healings, angelic protection, earthshaking prayer meetings, mass conversions and missionary adventures.

I want all of that. But I want the real thing, not a poor imitation.

Those first-century miracles flowed amidst a praying church that preached repentance and practiced holiness. The early disciples had been baptized with fire (see Matt. 3:11)—a cleansing flame that burns up sin and produces the fear of the Lord.

We've forgotten that the same people who experienced the miracle of Pentecost also watched Ananias and Sapphira drop dead because they willfully sinned in the middle of an outpouring of God's presence. When their bodies were carried away, the Bible says that, "great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things" (Acts 5:11, NKJV).

The early disciples weren't playing. Real revival is serious stuff. Not only does it bring joy and peace; it also has the power to crush inflated egos, expose selfishness and kill pride. Do we want that?

In the American church today we see revival hoopla but not much substance. We make things look good for the cameras. We have fanfare without fire. It's a show. We've lost the fear of God.

I believe if we really want the presence of God, we need the reverence of God. Yet it seems that in many of our churches today we want one without the other.

We love the ecstasy and the goose bumps that accompany revival

meetings. We like to shake, rattle and roll on the floor as we soak in the anointing. But I fear we've become so flippant about the Holy Spirit that we've stooped to playing games.

A case in point: In one meeting recently, two ministers stood on the pulpit and threw "fireballs" of "anointing" at each other. When the imagined glob of raw power hit one man, he fell over laughing. Then he threw his invisible fireball at his preacher friend, and he too fell. It made for good entertainment, but that's all it was.

There's also a trendy new teaching that compares a spiritual encounter with God to shooting heroin. In one "revival" service, people pretended to shoot invisible needles into their arms as they prayed for one another and asked God for His anointing.

One minister in Oregon actually refers to God as "Jehovahjuana"—implying that the Lord can give you a marijuana high.

Another conference speaker put a plastic Jesus from a nativity scene into his mouth and urged some teens to "smoke Baby Jesus."

Such flippant mishandling of the Lord's name is what the Bible calls blasphemy, and it grieves the Holy Spirit. It may seem harmless, but those who cavort so cavalierly with the things of God are in danger of exchanging the truth of the gospel for a counterfeit.

When God's power is moving in a church service, sometimes people may feel woozy and fall. I know this experience is real. God's power can do that. But how many times have you been in a meeting in which the visiting preacher felt compelled to push people down, or even slap them silly, in order to give the impression that it was God who sent them crashing to the floor?

Several years ago I was standing near the stage in a large meeting when a visiting evangelist said he wanted to pray for all the ministers in the auditorium. Immediately some ushers yanked me up to the platform, and the man of God raced over to “pray” for me. Before I knew it, I was assaulted in the name of the Lord.

Whack! The guy hit me so hard that I fell down and held my face in my hands to hide my grimace. The skin on my neck was stinging. When I finally went back to my seat, a friend ran over to congratulate me, saying, “Wow, I saw you go down under the power!” I had to grit my teeth and ask the Lord to help me forgive the preacher. (I wanted to whack him back.)

Why do we feel we must force something to happen? Why do we assume more bodies on the floor equals more anointing? To build ministry on foolish theatrics is to trust in the flesh.

Instead of an imaginary drug, a dramatic smack on the head or a fake fireball, we need a major dose of holy reverence—along with a sobering jolt of reality. Let’s repent of our childishness and stop pretending. Let’s show a watching world the real thing.

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