

Not Everything Done in God's Name Bears His Stamp of Approval

Even though there is flexibility and freedom, our experiences with God must align with the Scriptures and the character of God. "We should not interpret Scripture in the light of our experiences, but rather, interpret our experiences in the penetrating light of Scripture" (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones).

Feelings can be good and God-given; however, we cannot forget the prophet Jeremiah's words, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (17:9). Profoundly moving experiences do stir emotions, and they may "feel" right; however, emotions are primarily a vehicle for expression, not a gauge for Truth.

Scripture clearly supports the miraculous work of the Spirit today. I'm open but cautious. We need sound doctrine and the power of the Holy Spirit without checking our brains at the door.

Sadly, some of the disturbing behavior we've seen in Charismatic circles has been excused, and some of the leaders 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.

To counter this criticism, some of the followers of this movement say that those who oppose them will suffer the

judgment of God. When in reality, those who refuse God's offer of salvation will suffer judgment. Not everyone who says to Jesus "Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of the Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). God's will is that people truly repent of their sin, and turn to Him as Lord and Savior. The Lord is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (cf. 2 Peter 3:9). A person is not judged for seeking discernment, they are judged for rejecting the truth (cf. Romans 1:18).

Although some well-intentioned Christians are anxious to hear from God, 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.

I have seen many Christians, including pastors, get caught up in false manifestations and it never turns out good. But if repentance takes place, God can rebuild. Instead, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and everything else will fall in place (cf. Matthew 6:33). 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.

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.

Granted, Christians ☐do☐ look odd to the culture and revivals are not predictable, but this is not what I'm referring to. I'm referring to bizarre occurrences such as people appearing drunk at the pulpit, toying the Holy Ghost, and acting very strange.

The Apostle Paul warns against confusing and immature behavior that compromises the gospel. Falsehood and confusion often go hand-in-hand. Paul often corrected error 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 ground of the truth" (cf. 1 Timothy 3:14-15).

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

As a student of revivals, I understand that revivals are not predictable, and odd things do happen. As I read the Journals of George Whitefield, the Welsh Revivals, and the first hand

accounts of the First Great Awakening in America, I found that Pastor Jonathan Edward's words were true. He observed that a work of the Holy Spirit would be evident: 1) it would elevate the truth, 2) exalt Christ, 3) oppose Satan, 4) point people to the Scriptures, and 5) result in love for God and others.

Genuine revivals focus on preaching the totality of God's Word, calling out sin, and correcting error—holiness is sought, not hysteria. The result is genuine fruit, not ungodly fanaticism.

Some suggest that today's battle is not so much against liberals in the church, but against those who are "not open" to new prophecies and visions—those who "religiously hold to the written Word alone." This statement concerns me because it can be used to promote anything done in the name of the Lord.

Granted, Acts 2:17 is relevant for us today, "And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams." But this Scripture is balanced with, 1 John 4:1, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world." Not everything done in God's name bears His approval.

Watch my sermon on Youtube about the Holy Spirit.

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