

THE FAITH BUILDER

Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

Issue No 5.

24 March 2013

=====

From The Editor

There have been a number of debates over the years about whether Christians should follow the written Scriptures, or direct revelation from the Holy Spirit. Some have maintained that the written Scriptures are the "dead letter" which results in a Christian being formalised and non-responsive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Others have maintained that leaving the foundation of the written Scriptures and following "visions" and "impressions" supposedly from the Holy Spirit is a dangerous thing to do and invariably leads to heresy and error. They say that the false cults were started because of a "voice" or a vision that came to someone and this formed the basis of a system of religious teaching that departed from the orthodox doctrines of main-stream Christian faith and practice.

Ever since the Pentecostal revivals of the early 1900s, there has been a stronger emphasis on the work, ministry, and leading of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. There has been a greater acceptance of sensory manifestations of what is accepted as the work of the Spirit, and there has been a greater emphasis on the use of the gifts of the Spirit as outlined in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, especially the gifts of prophecy and tongues.

A significant amount of information has been disseminated through the "direct revelation" of prophecy, where the "prophets" have asserted that God has spoken to them directly. Many prophecies have been consistent with the written Scriptures, while what has been spoken in other prophecies have not been reflected in the general or specific teaching of Scripture, either Old or New Testament.

Also, there has been a lot of pressure placed on the listeners when a prophecy has been given, because the speaker has begin his prophecy with "thus says the Lord", implying that God is speaking directly through him. It is very difficult for anyone to get up and express doubt about what is being spoken because it might appear that the doubter is casting uncertainty on "the word of God". And if

someone gets up and says, "I don't believe that God is saying that", then the question must arise about where is the prophecy coming from then – the flesh or the devil? The chilling thought is the number of prophecies that are accepted without question in churches, without being consistent with the written Scriptures, might not be coming from the Holy Spirit at all; and worse still, if these prophecies are being inspired by demons, then for what underlying purpose are these prophecies given?

Of course, it depends on who is giving the prophecies. A prophecy given by a well-known and respected pastor or church leader would be more readily accepted than one given by a rank and file church member, whatever the source. Actually, a questionable prophecy given by a respected church leader is more dangerous to a congregation because of the trust that members have toward that leader. Their view would be that because he is a respected leader of the church and a mature, experienced Christian, his prophetic utterances must be sound and correct. Who would find it easy to believe that a recognised, "big name" preacher would be giving prophecies from demonic sources?

It is easier to discern a prophecy coming from a demon or the flesh if it comes from someone everyone else recognised as having spiritual problems. There was a person in a church I attended who had serious spiritual and social problems, who gave the loudest and longest prophecies each Sunday morning. To be honest, because people recognised the state of his walk with God, his prophecies were safely ignored and forgotten by the end of the next hymn. But the fact that he felt that he could give his prophecies in a public service, believing that God was speaking directly through him, shows a deficiency in the basic teaching of the principles of the prophetic that exists in many churches that promote the use of the gift of prophecy.

One of the major hindrances to sound doctrinal teaching about how the Holy Spirit works and how people perceive the voice of God is the notion that people cannot be taught how to hear the voice of God and how to operate the gifts of the Spirit in a way that Christ is glorified and Christian believers are encouraged and built up in their faith. Many believe that the Holy Spirit moves people in a spontaneous way and that if a person is, for example, taught how to use the gift of prophecy in a workshop environment under the supervision of mature and experienced mentors, he is doing it "in the flesh" and not in the Spirit. People who believe that God speaks

through people in a direct way, without that person using their own reasoning powers to discern what is being said, maintain that if a person stops and evaluates what is being spoken through them, is allowing their natural mind to get in the way of the flow of the Spirit. Wise, discerning, and mature believers will point out the many examples of lives being irreparably damaged by prophecies which have been taken at face value as the direct voice of God to them, and subsequently discovering through heartbreak and disappointment that it wasn't God speaking to them after all.

So, what is the answer to the problem of being able to distinguish between the voice of God and the other voices that come from the world, flesh and the devil? The Scripture says that we receive a "multitude of thoughts within us" (Psalm 94:19), and only a small proportion of those thoughts actual come from the Spirit of God.

Jesse Penn Lewis, in her book "*War On The Saints*", makes some insightful comparisons between what is true and what is counterfeit concerning the way the Holy Spirit moves within and through us"

True: "**God speaking:** Through His Word, by His Spirit, *in the spirit* and conscience of the man, illuminating the mind to understand the will of the Lord. **Page 136**"

False: Evil spirits speaking, whether puffing up, accusing, condemning or confusing the person, so that the person is bewildered or distracted and cannot exercise his reason or judgment. The "speaking" of accusing spirits resembles the "thinking," or speaking to oneself, when the words are not uttered audibly. **Pages 170, 171.** Also "Listening" on pages **119, 125, 136, 142, 143.**

True: **The voice of God:** Is heard and known *in the spirit* of man, wherein the Spirit of God dwells. God also speaks through the conscience, and through the written Word (see "Texts"), never confusing or dulling the faculties of the man, or perplexing him, so as to hinder clearness of judgment and reason. The true voice of God does not make a *demand* of unreasoning obedience to it, irrespective of the man's free volition. **Pages 137, 138.**

False: The counterfeit "voice" of God is usually loud and comes from outside the person. It can come from within, when the person is deeply possessed. It is frequently imperative and persistent, urging to sudden action. Confusing and clamorous, or subtle in suggestion; producing fear through its insistent demands, making the man a slave to supernatural power. May also be distinguished from the voice of God by its sometimes, trivial objective, and fruitless results when obeyed. Pages **137, 139, 141, 142.**

True: **Divine guidance**: Through the spirit and mind; *i.e.*, "drawing" in spirit, light in the mind: spirit and mind brought into one accord in harmony with the principles of the Word of God (Ephes. 5: 17; Phil. 1: 9-11 A.V. m.) Pages **134, 135, 136, 140, 219**.

False: Satanic guidance by supernatural voices, visions, leadings, drawings, are all dependent upon the passivity of the mind and reason, and take place in the sense-realm as a counterfeit of the true in the spirit. Pages **128, 134, 135, 136, 221, 222**.

True: **God giving "impressions"**: Means a gentle movement *in the spirit*, which leaves the person free to act of his own volition, and does not *compel* him to action. "impressions from God" are *within* in the shrine of the spirit; and not from a "power" outside, *e.g.*, in "touches" on the body, or an exterior compelling force. See **page 219** for action of the spirit.

False: Evil spirits' "impressions" are from outside, upon the person, and require certain conditions for the "impressions" to be given--*i.e.*, a sitting still and waiting, etc. These conditions can also be fulfilled unconsciously by cultivating passivity of the whole being. See obsession, ppp. Cf. **pages 128, 129**.

Firstly, we should not shrink back in fear from allowing the Holy Spirit to move in and through us. This is as much playing into the devil's hands as rushing ahead into the prophetic without knowing whether we are hearing the genuine voice of God or not.

We have an assurance that if we approach God with sincerity and wisdom, we will hear His voice and be able to recognise it. **"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me"** (John 10:27). So, the first principle about hearing the voice of God is that a person needs to be genuinely converted to Christ. There is no communication between the Holy Spirit and unconverted sinners.

The second principle is that a person aspiring to move in the prophetic and has the assurance that what he is accepting really comes from the Spirit of God, needs to be a good student of the written Scriptures. He needs to have a complete knowledge of the nature, plans, and purposes of God in each dispensation of His interaction with mankind. All Scripture is written for us, for exhortation and learning, but not all Scripture is written **to** us directly. For example, most of the Old Testament prophecies were written to the nation of Israel, warning them of the consequences of turning away from God, and the blessings of repenting and getting right with Him. Although we can learn a lot from those prophetic writings, they are not direct guidance for New Testament believers. The same goes for a lot of Jesus' teaching in the Gospels. He gave His teaching to unconverted Jews still under the Law of Moses. What we learn

from His teaching is the very high level of holiness that He expects from His followers; a level that we could never reach by ourselves.

And there are Scriptures that are written directly to post-resurrection, Spirit filled Christian believers, and we find a lot of that in the Epistles. It takes time and effort to become familiar with the Scriptures enough to know the difference. Without that investment of time in God's Word, we cannot have the assurance that the thoughts and impressions that are coming to us are in accordance with God's Word, and His plans and purposes for us and the Church in general.

The third important principle is that we need to spend time in the presence of God, fellowshiping with Him. It is in that secret, private place, alone with Him, that we develop the sensitivity and facility of hearing His voice to our hearts and spirit and to be able to distinguish it from all the other voices that come to us. This is more than going to the prayer room to get material for our next sermon, or to ask for stuff that we need, or to deal with any spiritual problem we have, or to intercede for others, although these are very important in themselves. What I am talking about is spending time in the presence of God for the sheer pleasure and joy in having fellowship with Him. It is in that place that we are getting to know Him, to recognise when He comes close to us.

Yes, we can know when we are in the presence of God wherever we might be. It is not so much of an emotional feeling of well-being or anything like that; but it is something that the Holy Spirit does within us that happens to none but Christian believers who are totally committed to Him and who find it their greatest pleasure and joy just to spend time with Him, not demanding anything, but just to have the enjoyment of being in that secret place with God.

The fourth principle of being able to know that when we speak to others in the Name of the Lord that we are being inspired by the Holy Spirit, is that we love the people we are ministering to. This is quite different to selfish ambition, wanting to enhance our reputations in the church, or to have some sort of power and control over others. Loving others involves a self-less love – that the person we are relating to is more important to God than ourselves.

“Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). This may not involve actually being a martyr for others, although this has happened at times, but it certainly does involve laying aside what might be important to us for the sake of others who have need of our ministry. It might be as simple as giving up a planned night at the movies with family to visit and give comfort and encouragement to a friend in hospital just before a major operation, or giving a box of groceries to a neighbour whose husband has lost his job. When we have that sort of attitude toward others, the Holy Spirit is able to move more freely through us, and our ministry would be much more readily accepted because they would know that we truly love them and that is what motivates us to reach out to them in their time of need.

I am a very strong advocate for writing instruction manuals and having training/equipping workshops on using the gifts of the Spirit. It is important to allow learners to have the opportunity to develop their gifting in an environment where they can make their mistakes and learn from them without the possibility of damaging the lives of uninformed people and, as a result, attracting undue criticism which might discourage them from continuing on in the prophetic. The safety of “prophetic workshops” and equipping days is that everyone is observed and monitored by mentors who are experienced and mature in the things of the Spirit. I think that this provides valuable learning experiences for those who are new and developing in hearing God’s voice and moving in the prophetic.

“But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil” (Hebrews 5:14). Moving and ministering in the prophetic, which is basically the same as working with the Holy Spirit, is something not for novices in the faith who are still dependent on the basic “milk” of the foundations of the faith, but are for the more mature and experienced who have gone through the training process under the guidance of good mentors. An important part of that process is the regular and constant involvement in equipping evenings, prophetic conferences, and seminars to get the opportunity to use the prophetic gift as much as possible, so that the necessary experience can be gained, through trial and error, leading to a mature function of the gift for the blessing and encouragement of others.

So, do we follow the leading of the Holy Spirit? Yes we do, but it is in the context of having confidence to start out in faith, having a good, comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the plans and purposes of God through the written Scriptures, spending plenty of time in the presence of God, having a selfless love for others, and we willing to be involved in training under the guidance of experienced mentors. This way, we can know that when we do receive something that we believe is the voice of God, then we can have a good assurance that it is.

“The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps” (Proverbs 16:9, NASB).

Paul Christensen, 24 March 2013.

SINGLE BLACK FEMALE seeks male companionship, ethnicity unimportant.

I'm a very good girl who LOVES to play.

I love long walks in the woods, riding in your ute, hunting, camping and fishing trips,
cozy winter nights lying by the fire.

Candlelit dinners will have me eating out of your hand.

I'll be at the front door when you get home from work, wearing only what nature

gave me.
Call (01409434328) and ask for Daisy, I'll be waiting....

For Daisy's picture, see it after the following:

The following was developed as a mental age assessment by the School of Psychiatry at Harvard University .

Take your time and see if you can read each line aloud without a mistake.

The average person over 45 years of age cannot do it!

1. This is this cat.
2. This is is cat.
3. This is how cat.
4. This is to cat.
5. This is keep cat.
6. This is an cat.
7. This is old cat.
8. This is fart cat.
9. This is busy cat.
10. This is for cat.
11. This is forty cat.
12. This is seconds cat.

Now go back and read the third word in each line from the top down.
I bet you cannot resist passing it on..

Lourdes

Did you hear of your man that went to Lourdes in a wheel chair!! They pushed him into the holy water and he came out with a brand new set of tyres.

Daisy



Over 15,000 men found themselves talking to the RSPCA St Kilda..

God is looking for YOU!

By Dr. Carl Conley

(Arizona, USA)

“For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him . . .” (2 Chronicles 16:9, NKJV).

God is looking for men and women who will be true to Him, and to the promises they have made. Christianity begins with a decision and a promise to God that we will follow Him all the days of our life! How often we make good promises to the Lord ~ and how often we fail God because we are not always true to our own word. As never before, the challenge before us is to “practice what we preach”; that is to “Be DOERS of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22-25; see also 1 John 3:18).

If we are not doers of the word, then we are only deceiving ourselves.

God is looking for servants who have yielded their hearts and wills to the cause of Christ, and to the extension of His Kingdom ~ servant-leaders who are willing to “Lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us” (Hebrews 12:1-3) in order to live our lives for His glory.

Everywhere Christians are saying (and it is true) that the end is near, that “the coming of the Lord is at hand” (James 5:7-8)

If ever there was a need to get the Gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed to ALL the world, then surely it is NOW!

God is looking for men and women who will believe His Word, and what the Word of God says we can do! We can really do things for God when we will act upon His Promises! The Apostle Paul said he could “do all things through Christ Who strengthened him” (Philippians 4:13). If Paul could do all things through Christ, then you and I can do all things through Christ. Let us not say we can’t when God says we can! He is looking for men and women who will say “Yes!” to His Promises, and get into action. You are the one He is depending upon. You are more than able through He who called you.

** Carl Conley is the Director of
Faith Community Churches International
P O Box 69305
Tucson, AZ 85737 USA
Web Site: www.fcciweb.org
You can E-Mail him at: fccidir@aol.com
For further spiritual articles, please contact us at:
The Gospel Faith Messenger Ministry
P O Box 57
Paraparaumu 5254
New Zealand.
E-Mail: gfm@gospel.org.nz
Website: www.gospel.org.nz*

HOW OLD ARE YOU?

A woman walked up to a little old man rocking in a chair on his porch.

"I couldn't help noticing how happy you look," she said. "What's your secret for a long happy life?"

"I smoke three packs of cigarettes a day," he said. "I also drink a case of whiskey a week, eat fatty foods, and never exercise."

"That's amazing," the woman said. "How old are you?"

Twenty-six," he said.

THE SEARCH FOR LEADERS

(Developed by Rodney W. Francis from original notes put out by "Christian Life Centre," Wellington, New Zealand).

"For exaltation ("promotion; to make high") comes neither from the east nor from the west nor from the south. But God is the Judge: He puts down one, and exalts another" (Psalm 75:6-7, NKJV).

There is a growing cry, as well as need, for God-called and God-ordained leaders to arise to fulfil their destinies. God and man are constantly searching for leaders in the various aspects of Christian ministry, work and outreach . . .

"The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people . . ." (1 Samuel 13:14).

"I beheld, and indeed there was no man . . ." . . . "Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem; see now and know; and seek in her open places if you can find a man, if there is anyone who executes judgment, who seeks the truth . . ." (Jeremiah 4:25 and 5:1).

"So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found none" (Ezekiel 22:30).

The over-riding need of the church, if it is to discharge its obligation to this "now" generation, is for a leadership that has God-given authority, is spiritual, has understanding of people's needs, and is sacrificial.

GOD-GIVEN AUTHORITY:

Because people need to be led by one who knows where he/she is going in God, and is therefore able to give clear direction; at the same time inspiring confidence. (Authority is not authority unless it is accepted by the people acknowledging that gifting of God in their leaders.)

SPIRITUAL:

Because that which can be explained purely in the natural will result only in sterility, as well as moral and spiritual bankruptcy (producing no fruit for God). Joseph was a man who was promoted from a prison to a ruler second only to Pharaoh in all the land of Egypt, because Pharaoh recognized the Spirit of God

in him. And Pharaoh said to his servants, *“Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?”* (Genesis 41:38).

UNDERSTANDING:

Because if we do not understand the many temperaments (behaviour, moods, character) of people we will quickly come to wrong conclusions about them, which will help to destroy rather than release them into their calling in God. When Solomon was promoted to leader of Israel, he asked God: *“Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?”* (1 Kings 3:9) ~ (Please read 1 Kings 3:5-28).

Paul’s desire and prayer was *“that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding”* (Colossians 1:9). (See also Ephesians 1:17-23 and Proverbs 4:4-7).

SACRIFICIAL:

Because leadership is modelled on the life of the One Who gave Himself for the whole world.

Leadership is more than the product of natural endowments and traits of personality. The real qualities are to be found in those who are willing to suffer for the sake of objectives great enough to demand their wholehearted obedience. Surely the Gospel’s claim on our life is great enough to make us want to be fully available to God in the place where He has planted us? This means total commitment to Jesus Christ and His body (the Church). God has a very definite purpose for your being where He has called you, so be encouraged to “Bloom where you are planted.” Let your roots go down deep so you can be prepared for whatever lies ahead. Right preparation leads to:

SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY:

This comes ~ often unsought ~ to those who, in earlier life, have proved themselves worthy of it by spirituality, discipline, ability and diligence. It comes to those who have learned the principles of submission and obedience, which cultivates a teachable spirit. Church and Ministry leaderships are not likely to release into responsible positions those who cannot be trusted through an inability to listen, learn and obey. Leadership is not “doing your own thing.” A great desire to please God by word and deed is an essential part of spiritual

authority. A willingness to lay down one's life totally, if necessary, for the Lord Whom we love.

Samuel Logan Brengle was one of the great leaders in the Salvation Army. He had this to say about spiritual authority: *"It is not won by promotion, but by many prayers and tears. It is attained by confessions of sins, and much heart-searching and humbling before God; by self-surrender, a courageous sacrifice of every idol; a bold, deathless, uncompromising and uncomplaining embracing of the Cross, and by an eternal, unfaltering looking unto Jesus crucified. That is a great price, but it must be unflinchingly paid by him/her who would not merely be a nominal leader, but a real spiritual man/woman whose power is recognized and felt in heaven, and hell, and on earth."*

A Comparison Between Some Of The Dominant Characteristics Of Natural And Spiritual Leadership

Natural:

Spiritual

Self-confident	Confident in God
Knows men	Also knows God
Makes own Decisions	Seeks to find God's Will
Ambitious	Self-effacing (humble)
Originates own Methods	Finds and Follows God's Methods
Enjoys Commanding Others	Motivated by Love for God and Man
Independent	God-dependent

For those who have aspirations ("strong desires to achieve something, such as success") for leadership and who feel that the doors are not opening up "as they should," need to understand that far more is required than a knowledge of the Word, an ability to preach or counsel, etc. God is the One Who promotes! Leaders come under a lot more pressure than others. They must be able to live by example ~ not only in the church or gathering, but also in the home ~ which is seen by Christians and non-Christians alike (1 Timothy 3:7). Jack Lloyd (Blenheim, NZ) once said: "People cannot hear what we say for what we are," and this is so true in the area of leadership.

Paul spent much time training Timothy in the ways of leadership, so when he was finally released into his ministry he had been established in the faith and could withstand the buffetings of Satan (See 1 Timothy 3:1-13). *"A man's gift makes room for him, and brings him before great men"* (Proverbs 18:16).

Real fulfilment in God can only be realized as we find His calling for us ~ and grow and flow in it.

Questions To Ask Potential Leaders:

Does he/she do little things well?
Has he/she learned the meaning of priorities?
Does he/she use their leisure time wisely?
Has he/she learned to take advantage of momentum (or opportunities given)?
Has he/she got initiative (or is he/she “a self starter”)?
What is his/her attitude to discouragement?
Has he/she the power of growth? i.e., a gatherer, or a scatterer?
How does he/she face impossible situations?
What are his/her weakest points?

Acts 6:3 mentions something about leadership:

“Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.”

Leadership Must Be:

Of Honest Report (Luke 8:15).
Full of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; Romans 14:17).
Full of Wisdom (James 1:5; James 3:17-18; Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:1-7; Proverbs 2:1-6).

Criteria Of Leadership Potential:

Most people have hidden and undeveloped callings and abilities, which through lack of self-analysis AND consequent lack of self-knowledge, may remain undiscovered. An objective study will help us:

Have you ever broken a bad habit?
Do you retain control of yourself when things go wrong?
Do you think independently? (or, Are you a “Yes” man or woman?)
Can you handle criticism objectively and remain unmoved under it?
Can you use disappointments creatively?
Do you secure the co-operation and respect of others?
Do you possess ability to secure discipline without resorting to show of force?
Do you find it easier to keep the peace, rather than remake it once it has been shattered?

Are you entrusted with the handling of difficult situations?
 Can you accept opposition from others without considering it a personal affront?
 Do you find it easy to make and keep personal friends?
 Are you unduly dependent on the praise and approval of others?
 Are you at ease in the presence of your superiors?
 Do your sub-ordinates appear at ease in your presence?
 Are you really interested in people, or do you show respect of persons?
 Can you anticipate the likely effect of a statement before you make it?
 Do you possess a strong and steady will?
 Do you nurse resentments?
 Are you readily optimistic? (“expect and see the best in all things”?)
 Are you in the grip of a vision similar to Paul ~ “This one thing I do . . .”
 (Philippians 3:13).
 Do you welcome responsibility?

Who am I, and What Does God Have for Me?

A. Recognize Your Desires ~ Honestly face up to your desires.

If I could be assured of success, what would I like most to do for the Lord?
 What is my greatest concern in serving the Lord?
 What is my greatest concern for the Church ~ locally, nationally, world-wide?
 What areas do you think we are lacking as a church or fellowship?

Would those desires and concerns really be what the Lord wanted?

B. What About Recognizing The Gifts That God Has Placed In You?

People need to sense a security within us. If we are secure in God ~ and in the place of His calling ~ and understand our gifts and abilities ~ they will know it. Using your talents and abilities confidently creates confidence in the people and provides an atmosphere in which they can grow. If I am insecure, people will sense that insecurity.

We Need To Settle These Questions In Our Lives

- What am I?
- What am I not?
- Why am I here?
- And not there?

Having settled that, it is important to then discover the role you are to play as we believe God for increase and a harvest of people. What makes you uniquely able to perform that responsibility? Let us try the following questions to help you discover this:

What would you really enjoy doing most for the Lord?

Is there any role you feel uncomfortable in?

What particular abilities do you think you have that are important to your local church or fellowship?

How could you cultivate and develop that ability?

Do you see women functioning in important positions in the church or fellowship gathering?

The key to success is start asking God for a vision of where you fit in.

C. Begin To Minister:

Do you really want to teach? Do not hang back.

Do you really want the gift of administration? Volunteer to help.

Do you really want the gift of mercy? Start visiting sick people.

Do you really want to minister in the Gifts of the Holy Spirit? Start mixing with people where they are allowed to function.

(In the above four cases discuss and co-operate with your leadership).

The Gifts and Abilities of the Holy Spirit are for service ~ that means work!

Confirmation of your area of ministry will come through the degree of fruitfulness and the sense of fulfilment. This sometimes is a matter of "trial and error."

LEARNING your gift will take TIME ~ **USING** your gift will take the REST OF YOUR LIFE!

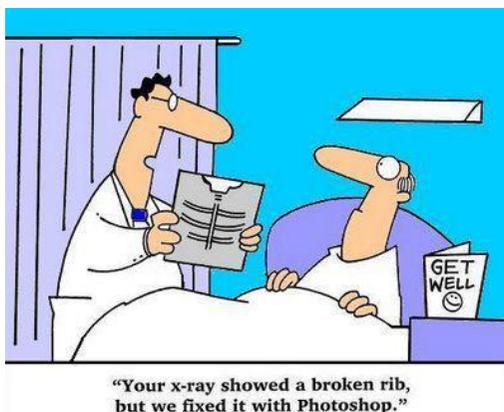
The Holy Spirit needs YOU!

We also need your help.

Finally, your church or fellowship gathering leadership welcomes your friendship and communication as to how you can better "flow in" with the fellowship where God has placed you in. To us it should be the best place in the world to be until such time as the Lord leads us out into something different.

Be God's example to others!

Rodney is the Founder/Director of "The Gospel Faith Messenger" Ministry which ministers to thousands through literature, Bible Correspondence Courses, books, manuals, preaching/teaching, conducting Seminars, "Schools Of The Holy Spirit," "International Training Schools" and the "Equipping of Timothy's." He has authored more than 34 books and carries a heart to see this generation of believers equipped with leadership skills to do the job of fulfilling the purposes of God. He ministers out from Paraparaumu, New Zealand, carrying credentials both with "The GFM" Ministry, and "United Kingdom Elim (ECI)".



THE HOLY SPIRIT OR FORMALISM?

By Paul Christensen

Colossians 1:9-12

“For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy.”

This is Paul’s prayer for the church and everyone in it. It is primarily written for the Colossians, but it is applicable to any member of any Christian church. This Scripture gives focus to our prayers, and sums up everything we want to receive from God – personally and as part of the church. God will move in our church when He has been able to move in us. The church is not just the building and the environment. These are merely the shell that encases the church. The church is also not the services or the ceremonies that take place within it. These are the vehicles by which Christians are enabled to worship and serve God. The church, therefore, is made up of the people who come to worship God in the services, and work in the organisation.

We view the church in two ways – personal and collective. The Holy Spirit moves on each individual member who has an influence on the collective gathering. The collective move of the Spirit is expressed in 1 Corinthians 14: “If anyone has a hymn”, etc^[1]. For the collective group to function in the Spirit effectively, each individual person must be moved by the Holy Spirit. There is no such thing as a passive member in a collective group which is moving in the Spirit. In reality, there are many passive members in our congregations who do nothing to contribute to the service except just by being there. This is one reason why our church services fall so far short of the demonstration of the working of the Holy Spirit that Paul had as standard when he preached; and what he wanted to see when he next was to visit the Corinthian church.

The style of services where people sit passively, as in a theatre while one person performs at the front, is not supported in the New Testament. The

New Testament supports the involvement of many individual participants in the spiritual worship, ie: contributing songs, words of encouragement and instruction, prophecies, etc. The New Testament does not support services made up of three hymns and a sermon. As long as we keep to that format, we cannot guarantee that the Holy Spirit is participating with us in our services.

Many potential ministries in the church are blocked and made ineffective by the formalism that is in our services. What we have is one person doing all the ministry when the Holy Spirit may be wanting to use others in the congregation as well. This might mean that the person ministering at the front might be ministering in the flesh instead of in the Spirit, merely because he or she is not the person chosen by the Spirit to minister at that particular time in the service.

A lot of prayers for services fall to the ground because in spite of us praying that the Holy Spirit will move, we prevent Him from doing what we ask for by programming the services according to what we think should happen – based on our formula for the content of the service. Usually the formula has been set in place through the way the church has traditionally conducted its Sunday services since the church in general tended towards formalisation in the Second Century AD. It is interesting to note that the supernatural operations of the Holy Spirit died out at roughly the same time, suggesting that there is a correlation between the church becoming formalised and the supernatural operations of the Holy Spirit disappearing from the church meetings.

Because we are not aware that the Holy Spirit may have chosen people in the congregation to contribute, we carry on with our set formula that leave these people sitting passively in the pews instead of contributing that particular song, word of encouragement or prophecy that might set up a wonderful environment for the Holy Spirit to do a deep work in the hearts of people in the service.

It is no wonder that our churches are declining when the majority of members are not getting their spiritual needs met in our services. It is also no wonder that the Holy Spirit is not adding people to our churches when He is not allowed to have His free way. He knows best how to meet the needs of people and where there is an environment where He can do what He wants, He will direct people there. The main reason why many traditional churches, even some “Spirit-filled” churches, are declining is that they have

programmed the Holy Spirit out of their services. As a result, the Holy Spirit is directing people elsewhere – where their spiritual needs will be met.

We pray that God will move in our community, half expecting that the move will happen in our church. In fact, He is moving in our community. He is moving with groups of believers who are open to Him and allowing Him to have His way in their services.

Here is a scenario: A person is going through a clinical depression and needs an encouraging word from the Holy Spirit. There are two churches available to the person for that to happen. A traditional church with a formalised service, and a small group meeting in a local school hall where every member is encouraged to seek God for a word of instruction, exposition of Scripture, a song, or a prophecy, so that the Holy Spirit is able to move spontaneously in the meeting. To which church will the Holy Spirit send the needy person? He will most likely bypass the formalised service and choose the small group meeting because there is a much higher likelihood that someone will be obedient to the Spirit and will give that needed word of encouragement to the person that may be the key to release the person from the depression.

So it seems that some Christian groups have discovered what it means to allow the Holy Spirit to move freely and effectively among their members and it seems that these are the groups that are blessed with spiritually hungry people joining them. There are other Christian groups that seem to have the attitude that they can have their formalism and have the Holy Spirit working in their services as usual. They are puzzled when there is no increase of numbers and vitality in their services, and why people go elsewhere to get their spiritual needs met. Often they blame the minister for the lack of fruitfulness, when it is the structure of their services and the formalism that has arisen out of their church tradition.

This is where Paul's prayer in Colossians 1:9-11 becomes relevant. What we will do is to "unpack" these verses to see if there is a reason why some Christian groups are prospering and other groups are languishing and declining.

Paul's prayer is that the Colossian fellowship will maintain the standard where the Holy Spirit can work effectively with them. In his prayer are the components of what should be present in the hearts of a group of believers in a Christian fellowship to enable them to have the confidence that the Holy Spirit is supporting their efforts.

“That you may be filled with the knowledge of His will”. If the Holy Spirit is going to work with our church group, we need to not only know what God’s will is in general, but we need to be filled with the knowledge of it. This means that we know it and are completely committed to it in exclusion to everything else, even if the alternative is good and could be appropriate in itself. There are two components with the knowledge of God’s will that the Holy Spirit gives us: Wisdom – ie: the ability to use the knowledge we have so it bears the best fruit. This links with Ephesians 1:17 where Paul prays that God would give the Ephesian Christians a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. This wisdom is not born out of human reason. It comes from above (James 3:17). Therefore, we must seek God for it. Without this wisdom we are considered spiritually unwise (Ephesians 5:17), even if we possess the best skills in human learning and understanding.

The other component is spiritual understanding. This also links with Ephesians 1:17 and James 3:17 and also Ephesians 5:17. Therefore, the understanding of the will of God is not something that we can gain by natural book learning, academic training, or human reasoning, but it must come by revelation from the Spirit of God. It is the same revelation that opened Peter’s understanding that Jesus is the Son of God (Matthew 16:15-16).

But this revelation does not come automatically. We must seek for it (Isaiah 55:6). Also we must make seeking the Lord our first priority (Matthew 6:33). God will reveal His secrets with those who put Him first (Psalm 25:14). Those who put the traditions of their church before the will of God will never discover the secrets that God wants to reveal to us (Mark 7:13).

What is the purpose of knowing the will of God, having wisdom and spiritual understanding? It is that we walk worthy of the Lord. (Colossians 1:10-11, Ephesians 4:1-16, 1Thessalonians 2:12). This is what makes us fruitful in the work that we are doing.

In this day when people are thinking and talking about church growth, it seems that people are concentrating on larger numbers and size of the physical organisation with better finances; but this in effect is making the tree larger with more branches and leaves, when it should be bearing the fruit it is designed for. What Paul’s prayer is looking at is fruitfulness. If a tree is expected to bear fruit, it doesn’t matter how big the tree grows, it will still be chopped down if it doesn’t bear fruit. If you plant an apple tree in your back yard, you expect it to start producing apples in due season. If it doesn’t bear the apples, then you would chop it out and replace it with a tree that will give

you apples. This is the same with churches. Many people view church growth in terms of numbers of members; but this does not mean that the church is fruitful. It is just that the church has got big and fat.

Spiritual fruitfulness consists in souls being saved, Christians being strengthened in their faith, ministries being established, and needs being met. A church may be adding members to it but if those members are passive “pew-sitters” then fruit is not being produced. The church can be the most attractive looking church in town, but if souls are not being saved and disciplined in it, then it is a fruitless tree, worth only for chopping down. What this means is that the church buildings can be taken away from that group and given to another that will bear the type of fruit that God expects. In every city we have churches that have become monuments to failure to do God’s will. They are fruitless trees of no value to God. Connected with that, we see church buildings in every town and city that are no longer being used for Christian worship. They have been sold to other organisations which have used them as conference centres, coffee houses, and other activities found in normal communities.

Somewhere along the line, a healthy Christian church has moved away from the will of God and has fallen into decline. This decline has either been very slow over a number of years, or has been rapid. The leadership either did not know what was happening, or they refused to give up their old traditional ways in a changing society when the Holy Spirit wanted to move among them in a fresh way. They did not perceive that the Holy Spirit was no longer with them, and people with needs were going elsewhere. As the congregation aged and died off, the church become more and more of a chaplaincy service for the survivors. At last, it was no longer viable for it to continue and it finally closed its doors.

Sadly this is happening with many traditional churches around us. The glory of God has departed because the leaders no longer know what the will of God is for them. They are depending on their traditions and formalised style of worship. So, fruitfulness is directly linked with knowing the will of God. James Henry Thornwell^[2] says “the will of God is the highest formal ground of obligation, and when that will is known to us, nothing can be added to make the duty more perfect”^[3]. He goes on to say, “The whole issue resolves itself into a question of authority. The case is simply, which shall be the supreme, the will of man or the will of God? The whole doctrine of sin

and holiness in their last determinations is found precisely here” [4]. From that, it can be safely pointed out that fruitfulness and spiritual growth in churches can also be found “precisely here”. Along with knowing the will of God, we need wisdom to apply it to the programme of the church, also having the spiritual understanding of how the Holy Spirit is wanting to move in the services. This wisdom is freely available to us for personal and collective use (James 1:5). All we have to do is to ask God for it and then be obedient to the prompting of the Spirit as He communicates with us.

An example of a church in decline because of ignoring the guidance of the Spirit would be seen in the following:

A traditional church is maintaining a formalised, programmed, order of service at its Sunday morning services. This type of service, made up of three hymns, Scripture reading, and sermon, has been in place since the church was founded many years before. In the days when people normally went to church on Sunday, the church was full and carried out successful programmes. Then society changed and people stopped automatically attending church, perhaps because of the introduction of Sunday sports and extended working hours in the weekends. There are two things that the church leaders can do in response to these changes:

(1) They can seek God afresh to find His will which will provide answers and wisdom and will enable them to amend the style of services and programmes to bring the church “up to date” with what the Holy Spirit is currently doing in the community.

(2) They can “box on” regardless, holding fast to their traditional services and hoping that God will intervene in some way. They pray every Sunday morning for God to “bless the service and the ministry of the Word this morning”. What they want is for God to apply His supernatural power to the existing format so that life can be breathed into it.

But what if the Holy Spirit has recognised the changes in society and is wanting to introduce new ways of worshipping and ministry? Here are some of the things the Spirit may be wanting to do:

1. Find ways of outreaching into the community instead of passively waiting for people to come to church.

2. Upgrade the worship services, including the music to make it more relevant to the current generation.

3. Change the format of the services from a “one man band” type to one where a wider range of congregation members have regular input into the services.

4. Rediscover what the Bible says about God’s resources and how to use them in the church meetings.

Paul knew how important his prayer in Colossians 1 was to the church in general. He was having to work very hard with some churches to make sure that they were operating within the will of God. We can see that clearly in his letters to the Corinthian and Galatian churches, where things were not going the way he believed the Holy Spirit wanted to lead them. In the Corinthian church it was a matter of how their services were conducted and members not walking worthy of their Christian testimony. In the Galatian church it was more of problems of doctrine where “false apostles” had arrived teaching them that they must be circumcised and observe the Mosaic Law in order to be saved. So it was important to him that leaders of Christian churches knew and were committed to the will of God and were open to the leading of the Holy Spirit so that there were no blockages or hindrances to fellowships bearing fruit for the Lord.

He believed that it was vitally important for believers to walk worthy of the Lord, and to please God in everything they did, personally and collectively. He knew that the will of God was (and still is) inseparately linked with the Word of God (Romans 10:17)^[5], and that faith is believing in, being obedient to, and acting on the Word of God. He knew and taught that without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6).

All these things are links in a chain, and when one link is broken, the whole chain fails. So, in summary, we see the principles of a healthy spiritual relationship with God, both for the individual believer and a church congregation. Here are the main points:

1. We need to have a comprehensive and accurate knowledge of the will of God for us and our church.
2. We need to have the wisdom that comes from God which must take priority over natural reasoning.
3. We need to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit, so that we have spiritual understanding of the issues that exist in our society, community, and church life and worship.
4. Through these we can know that we are walking worthy of the Lord in what we are doing in the secular world and the church.

5. That we are fully pleasing God through our faith in His Word.
6. That we are bearing fruit through our good works that will last for eternity.
7. That we are constantly growing in grace and in the knowledge of God.
8. And that we, individually and collectively, are growing in strength according to God's mighty power working in and through us for His glory.

-ooOoo

Appendix

Although what follows is an important principle that exemplifies what is expressed in the main article, I did not wish to distract readers from the general points. It is placed here to provide a specific example of what the Word of God says in relation to the way worship services should be conducted in our churches. This is based on 1 Corinthians 14:26:

“What shall we say then brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church” (NIV)^[6].

This is an express command of God about what should happen when Christians meet together. Note that the last sentence of the verse says that these must be done for the strengthening of the church. This command from Paul is just the same as if Jesus commanded it Himself, because Paul is speaking from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, showing the Corinthians how the Holy Spirit wants to work with them in their church meetings and services.

Most of our churches, in the way services are conducted, are ignoring the instruction in this verse. Even the churches that say they are Spirit-filled and Full Gospel are doing it. The New Testament does not support the style of service where there is a person on a raised platform at the front of the church performing to a passive “audience” as is commonly practised in our churches. Is it any surprise then, that there is little sign of the powerful, supernatural working of the Holy Spirit in those fellowships? It seems that everything has to be funnelled through the minister or pastor who is leading the meeting, with little or no opportunity for anyone else to have a meaningful input into

the service. Are these ministers then dictating to the Holy Spirit that He can only move through them, or those whom he authorises? They may not have that conscious intention, but in effect, this is what they are doing by the way they are conducting the church services. It is then no wonder that the Holy Spirit avoids those services and meetings. He is blocked from fulfilling the ministry that He wants to do.

It is therefore no surprise that some of the most meaningful work of the Holy spirit has been done in small, informal groups where each member of the group is free to share what the Spirit gives them. This is because the informal house groups are leading the way to being obedient to the Word of God about how fellowship meetings should be conducted. So then, expecting the Holy Spirit to “bless” the traditional meetings is more of presumption than faith, because they are wanting God to bless disobedience; something which the Holy Spirit will never do. Jesus put it clearly when He said, “Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and not do what I say? (Luke 6:46). Many traditional churches maintain that they are under the leadership of Christ and yet if they are disobeying direct commands of the Lord in the way they run their services, they may be putting their church tradition before the Word of God.

It is no wonder that in most areas, the church is weak and powerless to make significant inroads into what the devil is doing in our society. Paul, in his prayer in Colossians 1, links being obedient to the will of God with being strengthened with His mighty power. Obedience to the will of God is joined to compliance with the Word of God. This means that when a person or a church works contrary to God’s Word, they lose their strength in the Lord because they are no longer linked to God’s mighty power, just as Sampson was disobedient in allowing his hair to be cut and therefore lost his mighty strength to enable him to avoid capture by the Philistines^[7] Sampson did not realise that his strength had gone and he got up to do what he normally did to escape the Philistines, but his protection had vanished and he was easily captured. In the same way, when churches have departed from the Word of God, they lose their spiritual strength and then wonder why their efforts to bear fruit fail time after time. There are ministers and congregations who have lost their churches and are still wondering why, because they have not realised that they departed from the instructions given to them by the Holy Spirit through the guidance of the New Testament about how their churches should be run.

There is therefore a definite purpose in the way the services should be run according to 1 Corinthians 14:26. It is to strengthen the church. This is the only way to make the church strong. This is why Paul says so clearly that these things must be done for the strengthening of the church. I have come to believe that this is a key to why we are not seeing the miracles and healings that were commonplace in the first years of the early church. As the church became formalised, possible factors being the invasion of heresies and contrary doctrines attacking the church and the self-elevation of pastors who assumed leadership and dominated the running of services, the freedom of the Holy Spirit's ministry waned.

There are certain functions of the Holy Spirit that will only operate when the Spirit is in full control of proceedings. When a service becomes programmed and formalised, the spontaneity of the Spirit is blocked and He cannot perform those functions. As soon as that happens, the supernatural vanishes. No more people are healed or delivered from demons. Tongues, interpretation and true prophecy dry up. Sermons become ear-tickling homilies that may be interesting to listen to and contributes to natural religious knowledge, but do not work to increase true knowledge of God or spiritual growth. The natural becomes dominant and services are made up of singing, reading, and preaching. The "pastor" assumes full control because everyone else has become passive. Why? Without the moving of the Spirit they have nothing to do!

I don't want to leave you without an antidote. The way back to faith is to rediscover what the Word of God says about God's will for you in your personal spiritual life; and then once you have got that sorted out, then the Word will tell you how your church should be functioning if it is to function in the Holy Spirit. Then you can pray Paul's prayer in Colossians 1:9-11, and ask the Lord for wisdom about how you can apply your discoveries to encouraging others in your church and challenging the leadership to conform themselves to the Word of God in how the services should be running.

The Holy Spirit knows how to run a church service better than we can [8]; therefore it is more useful and productive to put our trust in Him and let Him have his way!!

[1] See Appendix

[2] Professor of Theology at Columbia Theological Academy, South Carolina during the 1870s.

[3] Collected Writings, 1875, Banner of Truth Trust, 1974, Vol 1, page 276.

[4] Page 277. Thornwell also makes the point that the issue of whether the will of man or the will of God is followed stems right back to Adam in the Garden of Eden. He says that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in itself a minor component. It was more of whether Adam was going to trust God, and that he was going to comply with God's will without having to have everything explained to him, because God is God and His Word can be taken at face value and be trusted for what it is: the Word of God. As we can see, the issue of how we worship God in church is whether we are going to worship Him according to His will as the Holy Spirit directs, or whether we set up our own format and programme the way we think it should happen according to our natural reasoning. It seems that many churches are following the example of Adam's disobedience instead of the obedience of Jesus, who said, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work" (John 4:34).

[5] "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

[6] The word "must" does not appear in all versions of Scripture, and most references concentrate on the need for the edifying of believers in a meeting. Most commentaries deal with the way spiritual gifts are used in a meeting rather than the structure of the meeting itself, which is quite consistent with the context of the chapter; but the way that traditional services and meetings are programmed there is little opportunity to use the gifts anyway, so the need to restructure Christian meetings to accommodate the free use of the gifts of the Spirit and for a wider range of congregation members to participate in the spiritual flow of the meeting is still very appropriate.

[7] The story is found in Judges chapters 13 to 16.

[8] Quoted from a statement by Rodney Francis, founder and director of the Gospel Faith Messenger Ministry at an equipping meeting at Hamilton, New Zealand, 20 April 2010.

doctors' strike



The Editor



Paul Christensen

This magazine's purpose is to build up the faith of believers.

I am an elder of St Aidan's Presbyterian Church in Conifer Grove, Auckland NZ. At present, I am assisting with the ministry of the church along with the other elders and very capable preachers as part of an elder-run church.

I am including articles from recognized, effective pastors and ministries that have proved themselves in having the Holy Spirit work with them in the conversion of sinners, effective and powerful impact that they have on believers, and in the growth of their churches. I think that it is important for the members of the congregation to have a range of ministry outside of their usual one-person ministry that has been the norm for a number of years before our current minister recently resigned.

You will notice that I have included jokes and humorous pictures in this magazine. I am a strong believer in humour as a healing resource. I believe that the business of sharing the Gospel is serious, but some become so serious that they are dour and humourless. I don't think that these people are a good advertisement if we want our church to grow and be filled with believers who are passionate for Christ and who approach their faith with joy. "In His presence is fullness of joy" (Psalm 16:11), and good, clean humour is an important part of that.

All articles are printed with the kind permission of the authors, who believe that it is important that the message of the Gospel gets out there, and the importance of walking with God in love and faith, along with unity among Christian believers.

Email: paul90@slingshot.co.nz

Once you have read this, pass it on to someone else who might be encouraged by reading it.