



**Does
God
Speak
To You?**

C. Parker Thomas

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Introduction

This booklet is composed of a wonderful series of articles published in the Midnight Cry Messenger during 1979. That God desires to communicate with us at all is simply amazing! Yet most people are willingly deaf when it comes to God. In this time of great spiritual darkness and deception what are the various ways in which He speaks and how can we learn to recognize His voice and respond?

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Chapter 1

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“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” Heb. 1:1-3.

Many people find it hard to believe that God actually speaks to man today. Among those who believe that he does speak to man today there is much controversy and debate. Many questions are raised as to how, where, when and who God speaks to.

Because of such divergent opinions among them, the often reported claims of many religious people that the Lord speaks and reveals things to them only adds to the confusion.

The fact that there is such a difference of opinion on doctrines and other vital issues is proof positive that many are deceived in their belief that God is speaking to them. No doubt, some source of intelligence is responsible for many of these claims. This is also true of all cults and false doctrines that have come forth in the earth to deceive man.

Since Satan led Eve astray in the Garden he has been lying and deceiving man through many means. Knowing that man is religious by nature he uses this as a chief tool to delude and separate man from God and true righteousness.

I Tim. 4:1 says, “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.”

Indeed we would be surprised if we knew how active Satan is in the realm of religion. In fact, we would be shocked if we knew how much religion Satan has actually fathered in the earth.

According to Paul's teaching in II Cor. 11:13-15, Satan's greatest act of deception is in transforming himself (falsely) into an angel (messenger) of light. Satan's ministers do exactly the same thing. Verse 15 says, “Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness: whose end shall be according to their works.”

By masquerading as angels of light Satan's ministers, clothed in human form, have an entree into all nations and segments of human society. Under the cloak of religion and other forms of ideology he is received with open arms by earth's multitudes. From corrupted and apostate Christianity to communism there is a literal flood of delusion going forth out of the mouth of the dragon. Rev. 12:15-16.

When statements like these are made most professing Christians think you have reference to the Jim Joneses, the Reverend Moons and the Father Divines. They have been taught that they are fundamental, orthodox and sound in the faith. It's always the other fellow that is a heretic.

There are two things that Satan does when he deceives man and leads him into strong delusion. First he discredits any true source of revelation that may be available. This is a subtle work of Satan that the deceived do not recognize. In order to get man to reject the truth he discredits the source or vessel through whom God is giving the truth.

When this has been done the only thing left for the unconverted is the lie or religious deception. Men are headed for religious delusion when they despise the truth. This is becoming a universal condition as we approach the return of Christ. According to Paul in II Thess. 2:1-12, men will be sent strong delusion because they loved not the truth that they might be saved.

This is accomplished through a subtle emphasis on how right their group or religious movement is and how wrong the others are. Some point to their historic faith and honored traditions as proof of their religious soundness.

Others point to their last day revelations or their religious experience as proof of the spiritual reality of their movement. Some of these point to their founder as a great prophet or last day messenger raised up for this special day.

The self-styled fundamentalist takes great pride in the fact that he believes in the book, the blood and the blessed hope. He is fundamental, missionary, premillennial and contending for the faith once delivered to the saints. With much authority and pride he points to the letter of the word (King James version) as his only rule for faith and practice. He thumps its pages with strong emphasis declaring it is his guide and road map to heaven.

What about all of these claims by the religious multitude? Many of them are zealous, sacrificial, sincere and thoroughly convinced. Many of them believe in good works and live morally clean lives. Is this a criterion or basis for faith?

Not by any stretch of the imagination. Paul said that the Jews had "...a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

“For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth.” Rom. 10:2-4.

The outstanding mark of the false prophet, false doctrine and false religion is that something else is at the center of their religious emphasis in place of Christ. It may be a doctrine, an ordinance, an experience, a human personality, their church or organization and, strange as it may seem, even the Bible itself.

However, let me make haste to point out that false doctrines and false prophets are not always responsible for lost religious people. Even where the gospel is preached there are some who have made something else their refuge other than the finished work of Christ. The Corinthian church had heard the gospel preached in its fullness by the apostle Paul, yet he told them to examine themselves, whether they be in the faith. II Cor. 13:5. To those of Galatia he said, “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel.” Gal. 1:6.

I might add that most of those that heard Jesus Christ turned away from the truth in process of time. John 6:66, 1 John 2:19. In fact it is evident from many scriptures that it is a very small remnant of people that come to saving faith. Isa. 1:9, Matt. 7:13-14, Luke 12:32, 13:23-24, Rom. 11:5.

The real reason men are lost is that they will not receive the truth. For the remnant capable of hearing his voice and following him it is important that we know how God speaks to us. Although there are many lost people who have heard the truth and rejected it, man must still hear the truth if he is to be saved.

Our purpose here is not to prove to the unbelieving that God indeed speaks to mortal man but rather to consider how God speaks to man.

By His Conscience

Along with a higher intelligence, God gave man a conscience which distinguishes him from the beast. When man hardens his heart and violates his conscience long enough, he descends to the level of the beast. Because of his higher intelligence he becomes a diabolical and sinister creature that is actually worse than the beast.

The conscience was given to man to bring him to truth that reveals God and righteousness to him. Although the conscience itself does not give man all the answers he needs concerning God it will lead him to truth that will reveal God to him.

Therefore, man's conscience is a source of light that will lead him out of the darkness if he will humbly listen to it. Man's search for God begins when the Lord speaks to his conscience. The search does not end until he finds Jesus Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life. If man doesn't harden his heart and sear his conscience it will bring him into contact with the glorious gospel (good news) of Jesus Christ who is the image of God. II Cor. 4:3-5.

According to Romans 2:14-16, the Gentiles or heathen (all people other than Jews) had a conscience capable of guiding them even though they were without the law as the Jews knew it. According to verse 15 there was a work of the law written in their hearts through which their conscience would bear witness to them.

This witness either accused or excused them. Since they did not have the law or the gospel, in the strictest sense they cannot be judged by either. However they will be judged by this inward witness of their hearts in the day when God judges the secrets of men by Jesus Christ. This being true, it means that God's judgment as Rom. 2:2 says will be according to truth that men have.

The more truth men have the more responsible they are. God's severest judgment will come upon those who hold the truth in unrighteousness. Rom. 1:18. According to this verse in the New Testament from 26 Translations by Zondervan, God's most severe judgment will be upon religious people who by their pride, rebellion, falsehood and general wickedness have stifled and suppressed the truth of God.

These no doubt are the workers of iniquity Jesus spoke of in Matt. 7:21-23, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

"Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

"And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

From the context of scripture it will be noted that these were religious people who actually called Jesus "Lord." They were very actively engaged in religious works, prophesying (preaching), casting out devils, and doing many other wonderful works.

But the Lord called them workers of iniquity. They had deceived their own hearts and thought they were doing a good work. Instead of bringing deliverance to men they were deceiving them as they were deceived and bringing them into captivity and strong delusion.

It is men like these whose conscience is seared as with a hot iron. I Tim. 4:1-2. This is why Paul said, “Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.)” Heb. 3:7-11

By The Creation

Although God does not reveal himself to man apart from his conscience, the creation itself is a voice in the earth speaking to man before his conscience is seared. Many of these scientific theories that discredit the biblical account of creation are often the result of a seared conscience. Psalm 19:1-3 says, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.”

With the God-given intelligence that man has he considers the creation when he observes it. As he observes the visible creation his intelligence informs him that this great creation was made by some power that is not manifest. He knows there has to be a creator or supreme being. Rom. 1:19-20.

Although this is not saving faith it is the beginning of faith that can lead us to saving faith through the word of God. Working with our conscience it can serve as a light or voice to lead us to the light of the gospel that reveals Christ to us. Heb. 11:3 says, “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.”

By The Prophets

Before the coming of the Son of God into the world God spoke unto the fathers in divers manners by the prophets. Although there were prophetic gifts given to men such as kings, judges and ordinary people the major prophet was uniquely God’s mouthpiece in the earth.

No doubt the lesser prophetic gifts were types of ministries comparable to elders in the local assembly during the church dispensation. The major prophet of the Old Testament and the apostle in the New Testament are foundation ministries whose responsibility is to God himself. Eph. 2:20, I Cor. 3:10.

Although the local church and the individual Christian is responsible to judge those claiming to be apostles or prophets (I John 4:1-4), the gift of a foundational ministry will make room for itself. Pro. 18:16. However, as we come over into the New Testament and the church dispensation the office of the major prophet ceases with the office of the apostle taking its place.

John the Baptist was the last of the major prophets. This is what Jesus meant when he said, "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it." Luke 16:16.

Some may take exception to this but it is evident that the New Testament prophet was, for the most part, a preacher or forthteller of the gospel. No doubt vocal ministries such as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers were called prophets at times.

However, there was a prophetic gift that enabled some to foretell the future as in the case of Agabus the prophet. Acts 11:27-28, 21:10-11. It is evident this man, though a genuine prophet in this sense, had a limited ministry. He is only mentioned twice and is nowhere looked upon as a leader or prominent figure in the early church.

By virtue of the need of the office the apostle was the most gifted. In the order of ministry given to the church by the Lord Jesus Christ when he ascended up on high, the apostle is first. Eph. 4:11. In fact, the apostle is said to be first in the church by Paul in I Cor. 12:28. Beyond doubt, Paul's ministry was a type of the complete ministry of Christ as set forth in Eph. 4:11. This ministry was manifest in the life of the apostles in varying degrees.

Old Testament

The prophets of the Old Testament were men chosen by God and anointed for this purpose. Although their talents and abilities varied, they were God's servants and were responsible to deliver his message to the people.

This was often done in the face of opposition and danger to their lives. In fact, many suffered persecution, imprisonment and even death for their faithfulness in delivering God's message.

Sometimes their message was of a general nature to the people and at other times it was to individuals such as commanders of armies, kings and ordinary people. Their message was often one of warning and severe rebuke. At other times their message was encouraging or instructive.

Although God permitted some of them to seal their testimony with their blood he honored and esteemed these men very highly for their work's sake. They were truly his mouthpieces or representatives in the earth. His method

was to contact and inform these men before divine intervention on the earth's scene. Before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah the Lord said, "...Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" Gen. 18:17.

Amos 3:7 says, "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets."

To despise and reject God's prophets meant to despise and reject him. To honor and receive God's prophets meant to honor and receive him. When the children of Israel rejected the theocratic rule of God through the prophet Samuel and desired a king like the other nations, the Lord said, "...Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them." I Sam. 8:7.

This was the burden of the Spirit in Christ when he said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." Matt. 23:37-39.

From this and other scriptures it is evident that the Lord completely identified himself with his ministry. Matt. 10:40-41. Despise the servant of the Lord and you cut yourself off from God. Men will never see the Lord (by revelation) until they say, "...Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

Rom. 10:13-15 says, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?"

"And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!"

How shall they preach except they be sent? Only those sent of God can preach his Word. His command to the world concerning them is, "Touch not mine anointed and do my prophets no harm." Psalm 105:15.

When men get hungry enough for God they will say, "...How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" Rom. 10:15.

Divers Manners

Divers simply means various or many. In the beginning there were no inspired scriptures that the prophets could read and interpret as the will of

God. They were dependent upon the Lord to reveal himself to them. For this God used whatever means was expedient or necessary to get the attention of his prophet. For example, the Lord appeared to Moses in a burning bush. Ex. 3:1-12. Then he spoke to Moses out of the burning bush. Whether the voice was audible or not we can't say. At least Moses heard it as though it were audible.

In order to convince the children of Israel that God indeed had sent Moses to them with his word, the Lord turned Moses' shepherd's rod into a serpent when cast upon the ground. Ex. 4:1-5.

Doubtless, extenuating circumstances here made it necessary for God to approach Moses in such a manner. There was also a reason he turned his shepherd's staff into a serpent as a sign. After forty years in the wilderness living the life of a lonely shepherd, having been a prince in Egypt, mighty in word and deed (Acts 7:22) it took these unusual manifestations to convince Moses and the children of Israel.

To many of the prophets the Lord simply spoke to them audibly or otherwise and they were able to recognize it as from God. Gen. 12:1-3, I Kings 19:9-12, Isa. 6:8-13, Jer. 1:4-10, Ezek. 1:3, Hosea 1:1, Joel 1:1, and Jonah 1:1-2.

No doubt the individual prophets had their own particular sensitivity that enabled them to recognize the voice of the Lord. Their call, responsibility and personal involvement were also factors in helping them recognize his voice.

In most cases they were God-conscious and God-fearing individuals. Many times they were involved or doing something that made wisdom from above expedient. The call of God to these men had nothing to do with their personal desire or training for such a work. God in his own sovereign wisdom called them according to his wisdom and purpose. Rom. 8:28, 11:29.

It is also true that some of them resisted the call of God and tried to avoid it. Notable examples of this are Moses and Jonah. Ex. 4:1, 10-18, Jonah 1:1-3. Moses' excuse was that he was a poor speaker and the people wouldn't believe that the Lord had indeed appeared to him.

In view of Moses' rearing as an Egyptian prince, mighty in word and deed, it seems from this that the forty years in the wilderness was necessary to strip him of his learning, his self confidence and self will. If it took forty years to unlearn Moses, how long do you think it would take for the average, modern preacher?

Jonah tried to flee from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and took a ship going to Tarshish. Jonah 1:3. He learned the hard way that there is no escape from the presence of the Lord. Psalms 139:7-12, Proverbs

15:3, Heb. 4:13. No doubt many of the storms of life, like Jonah's experience, are the result of man's rebellion in trying to avoid God's purpose for his life. Jonah 1:4-7.

Contrary to the attitude of Moses and Jonah, I find many aspiring prophets or preachers today eager and ready to move into their supposed ministry. Some, like Moses when he first went out to his brethren, are premature in their ambitious desire to do something for God. Moses wasn't ready, Israel wasn't ready, neither was Egypt ready for the exodus from Egypt. Acts 7:22-30.

I'm afraid most of today's preachers are like the prophets that sat at Jezebel's table who ate her bread and preached her word. They are simply part of a religious system and have no vision, no anointing and no desire for anything better. I Kings 18:19. Fact is most of them are intimidated and afraid of everything outside their own religious camp. Heb. 13:13.

In addition to simply speaking to the prophets God gave them dreams and visions in which he revealed his word to them. Gen. 28:12, I Kings 3:5, Gen. 15:1, Num. 12:6. He also sent angels to them with his word at times. Gen. 22:15, II Kings 1:3. God's revelation to them many times was for their personal instruction and good. But always the Lord's message to the people was to the prophet first and then to the people. Amos 3:7.

Chapter 2

(Editor's note: This is an article originally published in the September-October 1979 issue of the Midnight Cry Messenger.)

The Ministry Of Christ

As in times past God speaks to man today through his conscience, through the creation and, above all, through the ministry of the word. As surely as God called and anointed the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New Testament, he calls and anoints men today. The ministry of Christ given to the church is just as valid today as it was when he ascended up on high and sent the Holy Spirit upon the waiting disciples at Pentecost. Eph. 4:7-16, I Cor. 12:27-28.

This does not mean that everyone claiming to be a minister, or recognized as such, is indeed called of God. Some volunteer, some are persuaded and a few are called. It is my conviction that many of them need to be born again. This is why there is such little life in the churches and among professing Christians. It takes life to beget life. Everything brings forth after its own kind whether it be natural or spiritual.

Although they may be few and far between, God has his anointed servants in the earth today. They may not be recognized by the religious establishment but they are recognized by the Lord. With a spiritual understanding that God has given them they have an insight into the written word that goes far beyond the confines of most of the church world.

The word they preach is full of faith and power. It edifies the saint, convicts the sinner and stirs up the devil in others. It is a manifestation of the kingdom of God resulting in righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Rom. 14:17. Because it is often prophetic in nature, it imparts life and foretells the future according to the sovereign purpose of God.

Although this word comes through the anointed lips of mortal men, it is an expression of God's divine wisdom, love and power. Various translations of the Bible interpret Heb. 4:12 as follows: American Standard Version, "For the word of God is living and active." Rotherham, "For living is the word of God and energetic." Weymouth, "For the word of God is full of life and power." Moffatt, "For the Logos of God is a living thing, active." Williams, "For God's message is alive and full of power in action." Taylor, "For whatever God says to us is full of living power."

From these translations with their various shades of meaning, we begin to realize that God's word is more than a vehicle for thought. Laden with divine energy it is an expression or extension of Christ himself. It is actually Christ speaking in and through the church which is his body. Where the word is coming forth by the anointing it is Christ in the midst. Heb. 2:11-12, Matt. 18:20.

The name "Christ" (Christos) means anointed. It was by the anointing or the Spirit of Christ that the prophets spoke in the Old Testament. This is the meaning of Matt. 23:37 where Jesus said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

Men must hear the voice of the Son of God if they are to be saved. As surely as Jesus "...cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth" (John 11:43) he must speak to men today. It is the ministry given to the church that he speaks through. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."

To the disciples Jesus said, "He that receiveth you, receiveth me; and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me." Matt. 10:40.

This is the way men hear and receive Christ today. His voice is heard through anointed lips. Heb. 3:7-8.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live." John 5:24-25.

However, there is always a need to make a distinction between the anointed word and the letter of the word. The letter of the word (Bible) can be used, and often is, by demonic spirits who twist and pervert its meaning. This is why any particular group, though using the Bible, can interpret and preach it in such a way as to confirm and propagate their particular doctrines and religious traditions.

The fact that people use the Bible does not mean they have the anointed word of God. The Baptists use the Bible. The Methodists use the Bible. The Presbyterians use the Bible. The Seventh Day Adventists use the Bible. Jehovah's Witnesses use the Bible. The Mormons use the Bible. The Catholics use the Bible. The Pentecostals use the Bible. The Charismatics use the Bible. The Children of God (movement) use the Bible. So did Jim Jones and thousands of others.

Don't let anyone holding the Bible in his hand claiming such great honor and respect for it deceive you. We need to be able to discern whether it is Christ in them using the Bible or antichrist. I John 4:1-4. Remember

Jesus said, "For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many." Matt. 24:5.

The fact that many use the Bible and say that Jesus is the Christ doesn't mean anything. How else could Satan and his ministers transform themselves into angels of light? II Cor. 11:13-15.

If, as the scripture says, "God is not the author of confusion," I Cor. 14:33, what is the answer to all this? It is simple. Religion as a whole is made up of Babylon the great and her many harlot daughters. Rev. 17:5.

The much confusion and divergent opinions that exist among these groups speaks for itself. There is no way that all of this can be interpreted as true revelation. If God is not the author of confusion, who is? The answer is found in Rev. 18:2 which says, "...Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird."

Some of these groups started out with a measure of light which they walked in to begin with. God blessed them and overshadowed them with his presence. By degrees many of them got their eyes off of the Lord and began to glory in their success and their movement. This led to building their own kingdom and making them a name rather than honoring and glorifying the Lord. Gen. 11:1-4.

Since God will not give his glory to another he had to remove his presence from many of these groups. As the Lord removed his presence, there was no oil (Holy Spirit) left to feed the candle of revelation. Without the continuing light of revelation they were filled with darkness. Pro. 4:18. Evil spirits in people began to enter their ranks. In process of time they took over. Dead doctrines, creeds, religious traditions and doctrines of devils (I Tim. 4:1-4) became their message.

This was their fall as they became the habitation or dwelling place of devils. Rev. 18:2. Many of the demon-inspired cults and splinter groups began with a spirit of rebellion as they split off from the existing church system. After all, there was only one church after Pentecost.

In some measure the entire present day church world is under the influence of the apostasy. Like the Laodicean church they glory in their prosperity and think they have need of nothing when indeed they are spiritually destitute. Rev. 3:14-19. This is why it is well nigh impossible for a sinner to be converted in the average church today.

Thank God, as long as there is one soul whose conscience is not seared that he can't hear the voice of the Son of God there will be some place where they can hear sufficient truth to believe and be saved. However, these places are not on every corner. Those desiring God must seek and search for his truth with all their hearts. Jer. 29:13.

In this hour you will not find help in most churches or religious establishments. People in them will have to come out if they get help. Jesus took the blind man out of the town of Bethsaida before ministering to him. After healing the man Jesus told him to not go back into the town, neither tell anyone who was going into Bethsaida. Mark 8:22-26. He would not permit any further witness in this place. Much of our religious world has reached this place.

No matter how much conscience-stricken man considers God as he observes the creation or the circumstances of life he has to come to faith to be saved. Heb. 11:6 says, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

Faith to be saved cannot come by reading a book, a tract or the Bible itself. Men must hear the gospel preached in the power of the Holy Ghost. This is why Rom. 10:17 says, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

To the church at Corinth Paul said, "And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." I Cor. 2:4-5.

This scripture makes a distinction between man's faith standing in the wisdom of men and standing in the power of God. The testimony of God or the word can be with excellency of speech and wisdom and yet devoid of the power of God. I Cor. 2:1. No doubt this is the form of godliness that denies the power thereof that Paul spoke of in II Tim. 3:5. This is also the difference between the ministry of the Spirit and the ministry of the letter of the word. II Cor. 3:6.

I have noticed during these thirty-one years of ministering God's word an increasing emphasis on ministers having a degree. More and more even small churches want a pastor that has a seminary degree.

Many congregations actually feel that it takes a man with a degree to minister God's word. I'm afraid prestige has become a big factor in congregations with this outlook. This attitude breeds contempt for preachers without a degree. Excellency of speech is more important to the modern church world than the power and demonstration of the Spirit. Being spiritually blind they do not understand that it is "...not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Zech. 4:6.

The Bible Today

Although we have said much about the letter of the word and how the scriptures are twisted and perverted by some, let me hasten to add that the

Bible is the Book of books to the man of God. Primarily the Holy Spirit uses the Bible when God speaks to man. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." II Tim. 3:16-17.

In matters that require wisdom in our personal lives it is not always possible to get a "Thus saith the Lord" from the scriptures. For example: If we need wisdom concerning a trip we need to make, we could not find a verse of scripture that says, "Thou shalt go to New York."

Conditions

To get wisdom from God for personal direction which he promises to us liberally, James 1:5, we must acknowledge him in all our ways. Pro. 3:6. This can only be done when we realize that God alone understands and has all the answers. Isa. 40:28. Of necessity we must realize that we know nothing as we ought to. I Cor. 8:3.

Secondly, we must desire to do the Lord's will regardless of our own opinions or feelings in the matter. John 7:17. This is a very difficult place for most people to come to. Very few are free from selfish motivation that influences their wills. Most of mankind cannot believe in nor receive Jesus Christ because their wills are not free.

It could be religious bondage like the Jews or the bondage of natural, selfish desire. We cannot, nor will we, die to our own selfish wills until, by revelation, we see Christ. When we see Christ we will see the kingdom of God. Matt. 16:13-19, John 6:68-69, II Cor. 4:3-4 and John 3:3.

Man cannot will to do the will of God without the revelation of Christ. This is the revelation that caused Peter to say, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." John 6:68. This is the rock upon which the church is built, that the gates of hell shall not prevail against. This is what makes God real to us and enables us to endure in times of great trial. Heb. 11:24-27.

Thirdly, we need to wait on the Lord until light comes. Isa. 50:10-11. Waiting on the Lord can be a very trying experience. Most of us are impatient by nature. When in a state of indecision we are prone to anxiety and fear. It is in this state that we become vulnerable to false revelation and do the wrong thing. We need to ever remember that God has a purpose in such delays. When this purpose is accomplished he will give us such light as we need. James 1:2-8.

This light may come in the form of a word of wisdom from God. This could come directly to our heart by the Holy Spirit or through a human

vessel we have contact with. It could be through the preached word of God by the ministry.

Sometimes this wisdom comes by a peace or spiritual rest that witnesses to our heart that we are in the will of God as we move in a certain direction. The Lord said to Moses, "...my presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." Ex. 33:14.

The rest that comes from God's presence is a very important factor in being led of the Lord. I have learned over the years that when the Lord wants to lead me in a certain direction he stirs up my spirit and causes me to think of the thing he wants me to do.

However, I have learned to not be too quick in responding to such urging lest it be the enemy instead of the Lord. After sufficient prayer over the matter the Lord ministers faith to my heart to either drop the thing or surrender to move in the direction indicated. In either case the Holy Spirit ministers peace and rest to my heart and I know I'm in the will of God.

Religious Phenomena

Even today the Lord uses dreams, visions and, on occasions, sends an angel to us. However, I personally believe that angels are often used to minister to us even though we are not aware of it. Heb. 1:13-14. It is only on rare occasions that God allows us to see the angel that ministers to us.

This is because man is so proud he is subject to let the enemy exalt him because of his phenomenal experience. Even Paul, the great apostle, was given a thorn in the flesh to humble him lest he be exalted above measure. II Cor. 12:7.

Religious phenomena such as visions, dreams, angelic visitations, prophecy, discerning of spirits and other manifestations of the Spirit are discounted by formal Christianity. Those who believe in it are accused of witchcraft or, at best, ignorant religious fanaticism. And it is true that demonic power is responsible for much of the religious phenomena claimed by such groups.

However there are true phenomena given by the Lord as well as delusive phenomena given by satanic power. True phenomena are sovereignly given by the Lord to his people in times of great stress or need. It is a people who love the Lord and believe in Elijah's God. Although they believe in supernatural phenomena, they walk by faith and neither seek nor ask for signs and wonders.

Satanically inspired phenomena come to those who love not the truth that they might be saved. II Thess. 2:9-12. Not rooted and grounded in the word of God, yet religious, such people are open to the deceptions of Satan through religious phenomena.

By nature man is religious. He is prone to embrace something religious — either good or bad. By nature he is also a rebel and hates the truth that would set him free.

Religion that offers him a hope of heaven that does not cross his will and demand repentance appeals to him. When such religion is attended by supernatural phenomena it is especially appealing to the religious rebel.

This being the day of man's greatest rebellion against God in rejection of truth he is more open and receptive to supernatural religious delusion than ever before. Satan is being enthroned in the temple of God (heart of man) like never before. II Thess. 2:3-4.

This is the reason for such a revival of the occult. Witchcraft, spiritualism and astrology have become popular and respectable. There is an increase of the cults with their doctrines of devils. Sound in the faith people like Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians are being brought together with the Pentecostals and the Catholics through the phenomena of speaking in tongues.

This is the basis of fellowship and the drawing power of the Charismatic movement that is uniting and bringing together many divisions of religion. The basis of fellowship is not what you believe nor Christ and him crucified, but have you received the baptism and spoken in tongues?

In the midst of this hodge podge of counterfeit religious phenomena inspired and brought forth by the power of darkness there is a genuine.

We need to beware of and examine every supernatural experience by the word of God. It is also good to be in fellowship with a church with spiritual discernment that can examine our experience.

Any experience that exalts a person or group and causes them to feel spiritually superior is suspect.

Any experience that supposedly replaces the Bible or goes beyond its revelation in matters of faith and practice is suspect.

Any experience that eliminates the necessity of prayer and dependence upon God for help and wisdom is suspect. It is significant that the fortuneteller and the clairvoyant offer you such wisdom.

Any experience that causes division and leads to independent action apart from the church is suspect.

Any experience that causes an individual to become contentious and resist correction and counsel from the church is suspect.

In spite of the fact that Satan counterfeits everything that God does like Pharaoh's sorcerers and magicians of Egypt (Exodus 7:10-13), there is a genuine. If we walk in reverence and fear of the Lord and in harmony and fellowship with our brother we will know the difference.

The Scriptures

In the matter of needed wisdom for us personally, don't rule out the possibility of God using the scriptures to speak to you. You would be surprised at the depth of wisdom in the scriptures that can be used for this purpose.

I personally believe that this is the number one means God has ordained to use to speak to his people. The more scripture we learn and hide away in our hearts the easier it is for God to speak to us on a given occasion. David knew how important this was when he said, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Ps. 119:105. Read also Ps. 119:11, 92, 93, and 130.

I cannot overemphasize the need of God's word for those who desire intimate communion with the Lord. This is why it is so important to study the word without your religious glasses on.

Some study the Bible through Baptist glasses, some study it through Pentecostal glasses and some study it through Jehovah's Witness glasses. And some, even though they belong to a church, don't take time to study it at all. Like some who denied personal study of the Bible to the laity, they leave the study of the Bible to their clergy.

This is also why it is so important to have a ministry that is not restricted or confined to some religious prison house, behind walls of doctrine, creeds and religious tradition. Isaiah 42:22-25. If people are to be set free they have to have a ministry that is free. Jesus was a perfect example of such a ministry.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised. To preach the acceptable year of the Lord." Luke 4:18-19.

As we observe Jesus' life and ministry we notice that he constantly used the word of God. Over and over again in reference to the scriptures Jesus would say, "...it is written..." Matt. 11:10, Mark 7:6, Luke 7:27 and John 6:31. Jesus came against each of the three great temptations of Satan on the mount with the scriptures by saying, "...Satan, it is written..." Matt. 4:1-11.

Those who believe in and honor the word will be honored by the Lord. Jesus said, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." John 14:21.

To have his commandments and keep them simply means that Jesus is Lord of our life through the ruling principle of God's word. This is more

than Sunday religion. It is walking with the Lord as we govern our life by the word. Such a person becomes so sensitive and God-conscious until it is easy for the Lord to speak to him.

Having a knowledge of the word and being sensitive to the Holy Spirit, they quickly recognize even the small, still voice of the Lord. Although that voice is hardly more than an impression at times, they recognize it as from God.

If we have his word it is a matter of exercising ourselves in spiritual things. This will increase our ability to discern between good and evil. Heb. 5:14. There is no shortcut through religious experience or teaching that can take the place of such discipleship.

Although personal dedication and discipleship is a must, two things primarily are responsible for a lack of Christian growth and development in the church today. The sub-par condition of the ministry and the churches in general do not provide the spiritual nutrition necessary. You cannot grow and develop when you do not have proper food and exercise.

Like those in Hebrews 5:11-14, most of God's people today are spiritual babes that must be fed with milk and not solid food. It is difficult for them to discern good from evil. This was the condition of the Corinthian church. Paul said, "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ." I Cor. 3:1.

Strong churches and ministries will challenge the people, causing them to take Christ's yoke which will enable them to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Matt. 11:28-30, II Peter 3:18. It is only when we present our bodies a living sacrifice that transformation by the renewing of our minds begins to take place. To the degree this transformation takes place we will be able to prove or know "...what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." Rom. 12:1-2.

This, beloved, is the desirable place that God wants to bring us to. This is the place where we will be able to hear his voice. This is also the place where we will be vessels. "...unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work." II Tim. 2:21.

Chapter 3

(Editor's Note: This was an article originally published in the November-December 1979 issue of the Midnight Cry Messenger.)

This is the third and final part on the subject "Does God Speak To You?" In a day of religious form when God for the most part is theory to many professing Christians, it is challenging and refreshing to believe that the God of miracles and the early church is our God.

Our desire in this article is to simply provoke God's people to the realization that the days of miracles have not passed away. The cause of our spiritual dearth is apostate unbelief. Even Jesus was limited in what he could do when he went back to Nazareth because of their unbelief. Matt. 13:5b. When we begin believing in the God of the Bible then the God of the Bible will confirm his word as he did in New Testament times.

Although we personally are not very good examples of this spiritual reality we are convinced that God has, on certain occasions, confirmed his word and spoken to us. May we share some of these experiences with you?

Experiences

I could relate many experiences of my own and others in which God used his word in a most unusual way to speak in times of need. However I will confine my remarks to three examples.

Once I was disturbed, and praying, because of certain things taking place which affected the church. As I was praying, the Lord spoke to my heart and said, "Who are you trusting?"

Immediately I said, "Lord, I am trusting you."

The Lord replied, "If you are trusting me, what does that make you?"

Immediately I thought of Jeremiah 17:7 which says, "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is."

As this scripture came to my mind, I said, "Why Lord, that makes me blessed. I am a blessed man."

With this revelation from God's word all anxiety left me and I experienced the peace and rest of God. Needless to say, I got up from my knees and began to rejoice in the goodness of the Lord.

Another time I was walking in the woods and praying. I was discouraged and dissatisfied with the lack of results in the church at that time. As I prayed I began to compare myself with myself in times past. I was

telling the Lord about my revivals and the successes I had experienced at one time. Compared to the past I felt I was doing very little.

I was actually complaining and telling the Lord I wanted to quit if I couldn't accomplish any more than I was at the present time. Suddenly as I prayed in this manner, the Lord spoke to me using a passage of scripture I had never fully understood.

He said, "When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." John 21:18.

To say the least, I was stunned. I knew the Lord had spoken these words to Peter. But I also knew he was saying this to me. I wasn't imagining this. Under no circumstances would I have ever applied this scripture to myself. What did it mean? As I meditated on the meaning, it became as clear as a bell.

The Lord was telling me that those things of the past that I thought were so great weren't as great as I thought they were. It was actually me girding myself and doing my own thing. He was telling me that when I grew old I would realize I had no strength of my own. I would no longer run in my own wisdom and strength. In my destitution I would stretch forth my hands to him and he would give me his strength and carry me where I couldn't and wouldn't go in myself.

Although I had never thought of this scripture as applying to anyone other than self-willed, head-strong Peter, I could see now that it would apply to thousands of God's people who were as blind and head-strong as Peter was.

An even more unusual experience took place several years ago when I was going over to the North Carolina coast to minister to a small group of people. While over there I stayed with a man that was sick in body who didn't have much confidence in preachers, especially preachers who prayed for the sick. This man would almost explode if somebody wanted to pray for him. He seemed bitter and blamed preachers because they didn't heal people like Jesus did.

Despite all this, the man and his wife welcomed me into their home and, strange as it may seem, I had wonderful fellowship with them. I was very careful to avoid controversy and stay with things we could agree on.

However, at the first night's service I preached on the subject "According To Your Faith Be It Unto You." I wanted him to see he was responsible to believe God himself instead of blaming the preachers. Needless to say, things were very quiet in the car on the trip back to the

house after the service that night. At the house I was very careful to avoid the touchy subject.

As I prepared for bed I noticed this man settling down in a chair in the hall. Upon inquiry he told me there was no need to go to bed as he couldn't sleep. He had some kind of a thyroid condition that was worse when he would lie down and try to sleep. In fact, he told me he hadn't been to bed in several nights.

As I went to my room I felt sort of guilty leaving the poor man out in the hall, sitting in a chair. Feeling there was nothing I could do I went to bed and tried to go to sleep. However, I found I could not relax and go to sleep for thinking about the poor man sitting outside in the chair.

After about thirty minutes a small, still voice spoke to my heart and said, "Get up and pray for him that he might go to bed and get some rest and that he might know that you are my servant and I have sent you." I said to myself, "I'm imagining things. This couldn't be the Lord. Why would he want this man to know that I am the Lord's servant?"

Feeling confident that this wasn't the Lord, I turned over and tried to relax and forget it. After a few minutes the same words came to me again and I gave the same argument again only this time I added another reason why this couldn't be the Lord. It wouldn't do to suggest prayer for this man knowing how he felt about preachers. I didn't want to get run off in the middle of the night. Once again I turned over and tried to go to sleep.

But sleep fled from me as I lay there still arguing with myself. I was actually arguing with the Lord but not aware of it. After a few more minutes those words came to me the third time, only more forcefully. This time I told the Lord I wanted to do his will if I could believe it was his will.

Suddenly I had an idea that I thought would settle this thing. I told the Lord if he could speak to me through the scriptures I would have faith to obey him. Frankly I could not think of any scripture that would apply to this situation. How wrong I was!

I got an answer from the Lord as soon as I had made this proposition. The Lord said, "When I sent the disciples out I told them to let their peace be upon the homes of those that received them." I said, "Lord, do you mean that scripture can be applied to this situation?"

The Lord said to me, "Haven't these people opened their home and welcomed you into it? This makes them worthy. They are entitled to the benefits of this promise." Matt. 10:11-14.

Never in all of my life had I heard of this scripture being used. It had always been something strictly for the disciples during the days of Christ. Truly the Bible is a living book. It is for us today.

Neither the man nor his wife knew what was going on between the Lord and me in that room. With the revelation of this scripture I had faith to get up and call the man to the door for prayer. I simply told him I wanted to pray for him that he could go to bed and get some rest. Standing with the door ajar he humbly submitted while I prayed a short, simple prayer. I went back to bed then and was able to relax and go to sleep.

Shortly after prayer the man went to bed and fell into a deep, peaceful sleep. I was awake an hour or so after daybreak and resting quietly when I heard the man awaken in the room next to mine. Upon awakening he exclaimed to his wife, “Lord, have mercy, I have slept all night long.” As his feet hit the floor, he cried out, “Brother Thomas, are you awake?” When I told him I was, he said, “Can I come in?” Of course I said “yes” and he came on into the room.

Upon reaching my bed the man fell on his knees with tears in his eyes and said to me, “Brother Thomas, there is a man of God in the house.”

Some may wonder at this display of emotion which I certainly did not anticipate, nor want. But as I considered what had taken place I could see what the Lord had done.

First of all he wanted to change the man’s attitude which was actually bitter. He wanted him to know that despite his attitude he did have servants in the earth that he honored. When we are overcome by a wrong attitude, even though we are technically right, we may be in a worse condition than those we condemn.

Secondly, the Lord wanted to teach me a lesson. He wanted me to see how wrong we are in many of our religious concepts. And he wanted me to realize that his word is just as applicable today as it was two thousand years ago. I might add that we don’t have to seek the praise or approval of men, God himself will bear witness and honor us as he sees fit.

Yes, God speaks to men today. But he does not want us to be overly concerned about how, when or where this takes place. Our great concern should be to love and worship him and simply seek to do his will. He will not leave us in the dark when we need light. When there is a need we must trust him, knowing he fully understands our condition and will do what is best for us in process of time.

Things To Guard Against

We need to be careful about telling anyone about the source of wisdom we need. Too many people love to give advice and there are always some who can conjure up just the answer they think you need. The Lord will honor you when you look to him directly. Jesus said, “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy

Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.” Matt. 6:6.

Genuine faith is when we look to the Lord alone for our help, not trusting in the arm of flesh, including our own. Although the Lord uses various means to answer or meet our needs he is honored when we let him make that choice. This alone is the faith that pleases God. Heb. 11:6.

Not only do we need to guard against trusting in the arm of flesh for our help but we need to be careful lest we dictate to the Lord about how he answers us. God has promised us wisdom liberally but it is his sovereign prerogative to give us that wisdom when and how he pleases. Being God he knows better than we do.

Many times the Lord will answer us without others being aware of it. When the answer comes it will minister faith to us and satisfy our inquiring heart. Whether the Lord speaks to our heart personally, sends an angel to us, gives us a dream, a vision, or speaks to us through the word, wisdom from above always brings peace and rest with it. James 3:17.

The next thing we need to guard against is moving in a state of anxiety or fear. Move in faith. Faith brings peace and rest. Wait on the Lord until you can move in faith. Satan, through unbelief, ministers fear and anxiety to us. “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” II Tim. 1:7.

Waiting on God requires time and patience. We are to “ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.” James 1:6-7.

It is when we are in a state of anxiety, fear and unrest that the winds (evil spirits) of error and misdirection come against us. Hold on to God until the wind (Holy Spirit) of peace comes to your rescue. “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Phil. 4:6-7.

Signs

Some do not think that God speaks to man unless it is attended by a spiritual earthquake. This is the spirit of the sign seeker. Instead of having signs following them that believe, this is a case of supposed believers following signs.

Actually this is a manifestation of unbelief. God does not answer unbelief. When religious man persists in seeking signs he may get them but

not from God. Such unbelief as this attracts satanic power with lying signs and wonders.

Religious unbelief that seeks signs is responsible for so much fanaticism and emphasis of experience. Most of the people caught up in this web of satanic conspiracy have little knowledge of the word of God and are very unstable. Many of them will follow the devil if he shows them a sign. Deut. 13:1-5, Matt. 12:38-39, John 6:28-30, I Cor. 1:22-23.

From Deut. 13:1-5, Matt. 24:24 and II Thess. 2:9-12 it will be seen that God permits signs by the false prophet to prove his people. Even though God may see fit to give us a sign, we certainly shouldn't seek signs. God's people should seek their answers in faith based upon his word.

The Church

In seeking to hear from God we need to honor and respect the church which is Christ's body. It is not a building, an organization or just any group of people. The church is his habitation or earthly dwelling place. Ps. 132:13-18, Eph. 2:19-22 and Matt. 18:20.

It is by the church that God has ordained to make known the manifold wisdom of God. Eph. 3:10. To despise the church is to despise the Lord. Jesus said those that would not hear the church were to be looked upon as heathen and publicans. Matt. 18:17.

However, in considering the church we realize that much of the professing church world offers little help to those seeking God. Much of it is in spiritual darkness bound by creeds, doctrines and vain traditions. Some have been led astray by seducing spirits into doctrines of devils. I Tim. 4:1. Some, though fundamentally sound, are destitute of the life-giving Spirit.

All of this means that the seeker needs spiritual discernment. In addition to discerning the negative things in the professing church we need to be careful that we do not discount some particular church on the strength of gossip or common report. As is often the case, Satan sees to it that a church with light to help people is maligned and falsely accused.

Knowing that proud religious man is greatly influenced by reproach, Satan seeks to brand such a church as quickly as possible. As a rule the most vehement accusers of such a church are the organized church world around it. This is Satan's most effective means of keeping potential seekers from hearing the truth.

Ostracism and reproach heaped upon a church is often a badge of honor and indication that Christ is in the midst. One thing is for sure, Christ is outside the world system and religious respectability. "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach." Heb. 13:13.

What To Look For

In seeking a church where the Lord is in the midst and speaking to his people, we need to know what to look for. Since there are by far more churches without a true testimony of Christ in them we need to be able to recognize these churches also.

Tradition

Blind tradition was one of the reasons the Pharisees could not recognize Jesus nor receive his word. In fact they considered him a transgressor because he did not honor their cherished traditions. Matt. 15:1-9. It was because of their tradition that the word of God was made of none effect to them. Matt. 15:6.

Religious tradition is very deceptive because it is often so close to the truth. It could be truth misapplied, truth misunderstood or truth mixed with error. It is also truth devoid of life because it is not relevant to man's needs.

Tradition does not always ignore the scriptures but rather uses them the wrong way. Usually they are taken out of context, misinterpreted and misapplied to confirm a church's pet doctrines and creeds.

Tradition glories in the revelation or blessings of yesterday, but it cannot see nor receive what God is saying today. Although religious tradition claims great faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the apostles and the prophets of old, it is unable to recognize those sent of God in its day. John 5:38-46.

Religious tradition without Christ is a spirit that killed the prophets, yet built their tombs and garnished the sepulchres of the righteous. It was this spirit in Cain that slew Abel. It was this spirit in the scribes and the Pharisees that rejected and crucified Christ. It is this spirit in religion today that despises the truth. Matt. 23:29-36.

Tradition is often a manifestation of the carnal or natural man that seeks to perpetuate the glory of today's experience. It lives in the past because it does not have the revelation of the Holy Spirit today. Being antichrist it does not seek nor honor Christ as the head of the church.

Peter's desire to build three tabernacles, supposedly in honor of Jesus, Moses and Elijah, is an example. However, it is evident from the Father's answer to Peter that he was not interested in perpetuating today's experience however glorious it might be. His answer to Peter was, "...This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." Matt. 17:1-5.

This same principle is true today. God is not interested in our religious shrines commemorating the past. This includes experiences involving the Lord Jesus Christ, Moses and Elijah. The deader a church becomes the more

statues of Jesus and the saints it builds and the more religious relics it enshrines.

Earthly Jerusalem

Idolatrous man has made religious shrines out of the supposed tomb of Jesus, the well of Samaria, Nazareth, Bethlehem, etc. This same spirit still insists on calling the natural Jew God's chosen people. Although I will be accused of blaspheming by some, God's word calls Jerusalem Sodom and Egypt. Rev. 11:8. Religious idolatry plus the opportunity for a fast buck is responsible for many of these trips to the Holy Land.

Ironically, earthly Jerusalem (city of peace) has been one of the most strife-filled, war-torn and bloodiest cities in the world. It was religious hatred in the hearts of those who revered Jerusalem that sent our Lord Jesus Christ to the cross.

Jerusalem was an earthly type that had to give way for the true heavenly Jerusalem that is from above and eternal. It is this Jerusalem that Jew and Gentile have come to since the birth of the church at Pentecost. Gal. 4:26, Heb. 12:18-24.

Our God is the great "I Am," not "has been" or "will be." He is a living God who raised Christ from the dead. By the Spirit, Christ came back and indwelt the church on the day of Pentecost. He is in our midst and speaking today to those who can hear his voice.

Religious Extremes

Churches that go to extremes, or put a strong emphasis on certain doctrines, ordinances or religious experiences may be under the influence of demons. Knowing that some people cannot be led away into obvious doctrines of devils, Satan cleverly leads some into religious extremes that accomplish the same purpose.

It is very easy to detect this condition in a church or people if you are around them very long. The religious spirit that is in them will not let them remain silent concerning their pet views. Where people have received religious spirits they feel a compulsion to share their views with others.

If a spirit has sidetracked them on the doctrine of the Godhead they will seek to minister their belief to you.

If their hang-up is sanctification, baptism, predestination, tongues evidence or otherwise, the result is the same. It is not so much the doctrine as it is the spirit ministering the doctrine. In fact, it is possible for the doctrine to be technically right and the spirit wrong.

Of necessity, religious spirits use some truth mixed in with error or wrong emphasis to deceive the listener. It is when the emphasis magnifies a

doctrine or teaching to the degree that it eclipses other doctrines of the Bible that something is wrong.

Take note of any church or ministry whose main emphasis is something other than Christ and him crucified. I Cor. 2:2. The gospel has to do with Christ, the cross and the atoning blood. Man cannot be saved without it. It is the power of God unto salvation. Rom. 1:16, I Cor. 1:18. A religious emphasis that focuses attention on something else is a deception of Satan to cause man to miss Christ.

Examples

An example of this is the strong emphasis of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit that is so popular today. This appeals to the natural man because it offers him supernatural power, spiritual reality, religious ecstasy and preeminence.

This is the basic appeal of the thousand and one charismatics that have sprung up all over the world. I'm afraid most of it is natural religious man devoid of faith seeking a sign. In reality, the Holy Spirit was not given to preach or magnify the Holy Spirit. John 16:13-14.

When the ministering spirit in an individual, a group or a church is more interested in telling people about the Holy Spirit than they are Christ, something is wrong. It is not the Holy Spirit ministering through them. The center of the ministry of the Spirit is Christ and him crucified.

This is not to say that the Holy Spirit will not minister other aspects of truth relative to the needs of God's people. This will be done as the occasion demands but the ministry of the Spirit will always come back to the emphasis that glorifies and exalts the Lord Jesus Christ.

Easy Believism

Another wrong emphasis that many are guilty of is easy believism. The desire to make it easy for seekers to become Christians and join the church is responsible for this. Like Sarah, the fear of reproach for being barren is a strong factor. Gen. 16:1-4.

Easy believism does not preach a gospel that causes the seeker to count the cost. Luke 14:28-33. This would eliminate many of their potential converts. To avoid this their message is designed to spare the flesh and get a quick easy decision. Although there is a measure of truth in easy believism much of it is devoid of the Spirit of life. It takes truth and spirit to set men free.

Without the word and the anointing man has to resort to psychological or natural means to gain converts. But the converts are children of the flesh like Ishmael and not children of promise like Isaac. Gal. 4:22-31.

It is said that D. L. Moody, although anointed of the Lord, was the forerunner of easy believism. He was a master at getting decisions. A follow-up of his converts showed that eighty percent (80%) of them fell away after awhile.

Charles G. Finney, a man mightily anointed by the Holy Spirit preached an uncompromising gospel that demanded repentance. He did not try to get decisions but depended on the Holy Spirit through the word to convict men of their sins. A follow-up of his converts revealed just the opposite result from Mr. Moody's. Eighty percent (80%) of Mr. Finney's converts continued on with the Lord with only twenty percent (20%) falling away.

Basically, this is what is wrong with modern evangelism. A follow-up of Billy Graham's campaigns in several places revealed a shocking lack of results. Although thousands of professions of faith were reported they could not find a single convert in many of the churches that participated.

An anointing alone with a meager or insufficient knowledge of truth is not enough to bring men to Christ. The messenger of the Lord must have a spiritual insight into the word that enables him to employ such truth as is relevant to the need.

An example of what we mean is found in the ministry of Apollos. Acts 18:24-28, 19:1-7. Before being instructed in the way of God more perfectly by Aquila and Priscilla, Apollos was said to be an eloquent man, mighty in the scriptures and fervent in the Spirit.

Although he spoke and taught diligently the things of the Lord he was unable to bring men into spiritual reality. Knowing only the baptism of John he could not minister apostolic baptism. This is why Paul further instructed the twelve converts of Apollos and rebaptized them in the name of the Lord Jesus. Acts 19:1-7.

If the mighty ministry of Apollos was limited in what it could do because of a lack of spiritual knowledge, what about the modern preacher today. It is my conviction that when we get back to apostolic revelation and methods we will get apostolic results.

What We Can Expect

Although I do not know of any church moving in apostolic power and revelation today I believe God is working with a remnant church. The work of restoration spoken of by the prophet (Joel 2:25-32) is under way.

The outpouring of the Spirit promised by Joel had a near and far fulfillment. Pentecost was the former rain. The signs in the heavens and earth with the sun turned into darkness and the moon into blood did not take place as quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost. Acts 2:16-21. These signs

will follow the outpouring of the latter rain and precede the coming of Christ.

Jesus himself spoke of these signs preceding his coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. Matt. 24:27-31. At this coming he will gather together his elect from the four winds (Matt. 24:31) and take vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. II Thess. 2:7-10.

From the scripture above it is obvious that two things will happen at the second coming of Christ. The wicked will be punished with everlasting destruction and Jesus will be glorified in his saints.

This teaching does not give the wicked a false hope of another chance during a so-called millennial reign of a thousand years. Paul's teaching is in harmony with Jesus' teaching on the subject. As it was in the days of Noah so shall it be at the coming of the son of man.

What happened to the wicked when God sent the flood upon the earth? Matt. 24:37-39. What happened to the wicked left in Sodom when the Lord took Lot out? Luke 17:28-30. In both cases the wicked were destroyed. Peter likewise teaches the destruction of all things at the coming of Christ. II Peter 3:1-15. Jesus' parables that have to do with his coming teach exactly the same thing, hope and deliverance for the righteous and destruction for the wicked. Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43 and 47-50.

Even as God spoke to Noah giving him instructions to build the ark in preparation for the flood the Lord is speaking to his remnant church today. The revelation today is to prepare the church for the end of this age and the coming of Christ.

It is going to take a restored church to stand against the increasing power of darkness and the flood tide of iniquity that is rising in the earth. Isa. 59:19, 60:1-2. This restored church, like the ark, will be a refuge of safety and a means of deliverance for God's people. Isa. 4:5-6.

This is relevant truth that we need to be prepared for the end of this age. This is the truth that the church and the ministry must have to help God's people. This is why it is so important that the seeker of God finds a church that the Lord is using to help his people.

In conclusion, let me say that there is so much wrong with the church world today it would be impossible for this writer to put his finger on everything. If I could, you wouldn't need to seek God for divine wisdom in your search for a church with the testimony of Christ. The Lord wants you to personally seek him. Matt. 7:7-11. When you honor the Lord in your dependence upon him he will honor you. "In all thy way acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Pro. 3:6.

When you are led to such a church you will know it. There will be a spiritual liberty among the people. II Cor. 3:17. They will appreciate and honor the word of God. Compared to most churches a spirit of welcome and love will be manifest among the people. Although such a church will have a balance of relevant truth it will be Christ centered.

The spiritual atmosphere of the services will be conducive to worship and praise. You will be edified, cleansed and strengthened in the inner man. Such a church will minister life to you in the form of faith, hope and charity. I Cor. 13:13.

OTHER BOOKS

Conspiracy of Lucifer, *by C. Parker Thomas*

From the series of five articles: Do you recognize the ways in which Lucifer is actively working to take complete control of the minds of men? This book will open your eyes and make you think. Suggested Price - \$3.00

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Contains the article by the same name as well as an article entitled "Tongues Should be Tested" by Gerald McGraw in which he recounts lessons learned from testing to discover the spirit enabling someone to speak in tongues. Startling! Suggested price - \$2.00.

Your Adversary, by C. Parker Thomas

Recently, while looking through some of our oldest issues of the MCM, we uncovered this timely gem, published in about 1960! Originally published in two parts, it is reprinted here in its entirety. There is a simple directness and clarity in this teaching that will help anyone who desires to walk with the Lord and overcome in this hour. I believe that many of you will be amazed at how something written that long ago could be so perfectly relevant to the present need of God's people! Suggested Price - \$1.00.

***Note:** The prices listed above are suggested with the thought in mind of simply covering the costs of printing and mailing these materials. It is not our intention to become a "book-seller," selling books for profit. Our desire is to get out truth that can help set God's people free in this critical hour. Please write to us at:*

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