

A Call for the Discerning of Spirits in This End-Time Revival

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Many churches are being invaded with waves of uncontrollable laughter, weeping, falling, shaking, jerking, roaring and other unusual manifestations. Some Christians are participating – some are observing – others have walked away in disgust that such things could be happening in the name of the Lord.

Leaders are in a quandary, “Is this from God? If it's from God, we don't want to say or do anything against it. If it's not from God, we can't allow it to continue.” They are trying to decide, “Maybe this manifestation is from God, but is that one from Him?” The manifestations that are occurring are of the utmost concern to leaders in the church today.

What is the fruit? Testimonies of outstanding spiritual, emotional and physical transformations are being reported by many who have attended these meetings. Thousands, hungry for more of God's presence in their lives, have been drawn from across the country and from around the world. Hundreds have come out of curiosity, or even as skeptics. To the surprise of their families, friends and even themselves, many of these skeptics have suddenly been overwhelmed with the same manifestations that a moment before they thought were out of order.

There seems to be a true “renewal” by the Holy Spirit in many churches. Believers are receiving a touch from God. Manifestations of true renewal are moving as a fresh breath of God's Spirit.

In some locations, these meetings have taken on all the characteristics of true historic revival. Believers are openly and unashamedly repenting of their sins and are beginning to live holy lives. Unbelievers are being drawn supernaturally and are falling under the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, repenting, and coming to Jesus.

One of the most interesting characteristics of the manifestations that often accompany this move of God is that they seem to be contagious. Many pastors who have come to evaluate these phenomena have received what they judge to be overwhelming, life-changing experiences in the presence of the Lord. They have returned to their own churches and the same manifestations have erupted. Others have returned to their churches with little or no evidence of any change taking place.

One problem has been the believers who have attended these meetings and have attempted to take their experiences back to their own churches

without the support of their pastors or elders. In their immaturity, they have judged their own churches to be “missing God,” and have become disruptive in their attitude and behavior.

There are also those who think that their pastor “has lost his mind” in allowing such manifestations to occur. They have come expecting to receive the teaching of the Word and are offended by those who begin to experience manifestations causing distractions and interruptions during the sermon.

Some churches, where these manifestations have occurred, experience an increase in attendance. Other churches have reported losing a large percentage of their congregations. In many services, the manifestations become so disruptive that it is no longer possible to teach. Some believers are so preoccupied with the manifestations, they no longer want to listen to the Word of God.

Pastors are bewildered as to what to do. They and believers, leaders, associations and denominations have become divided in their opinions regarding these unusual manifestations.

The question has become, “Is this truly a move of God?” A better question would be, “Are these manifestations of God, of the human spirit, or of Satan?”

We feel the answer is, “Yes, this is a move of God. Yes, the manifestations are of God – or of the human spirit – or of Satan.” The same type of physical manifestation can come from three different sources. Now the question becomes, “How can we tell the difference?”

Part of the problem is that many are following the manifestations instead of discerning the moves of God. To discern if a move is truly of the Spirit, we must know it through the Spirit – not through our mental reasoning powers. We can know what is of the Holy Spirit, or from the human flesh, or from an evil spirit, by the operation of the revelation gifts of the Holy Spirit. The gift of the discerning of spirits is probably the most needed but neglected of the nine supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus warned that in these last days “even the elect would be deceived if that were possible.” Why is it not possible? – because of the gift of discerning of spirits.

We need to understand once more what the discerning of spirits is. Often we hear it called the gift of discernment. It's not that. *The New International Bible* refers to this gift as

distinguishing between spirits, and this is a more accurate definition.

Discernment is an operation of human wisdom in the area of the mind. It comes through the reasoning power of the mind. An unbeliever or a carnal Christian can operate in discernment.

The gift of the discerning of, or distinguishing between spirits, is a supernatural gift of the Holy Spirit by which we receive supernatural revelation from the Holy Spirit directly into our spirits. It is a “knowing” that comes into our spirits by which we discern the nature of any spirit being manifested.

By its operation, we can discern the presence, nature and function of God, His angels, evil spirits or a human spirit. We can supernaturally know what is of God, what is of the flesh, or of the satanic kingdom. We will not be judging the action but knowing the spirit causing the action.

In this present renewal or revival, leaders must know each manifestation by the Spirit. Then they must operate in the gift of the discerning of spirits. They must operate in the gift of supernatural wisdom to know what to do when the manifestation is from the flesh or demonic in origin.

In some meetings, Joyce and I have watched as people rolled on the floor in deep laughter totally overwhelmed by the joy of the Lord. Truly the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Occasionally, God has supernaturally filled our own mouths with laughter.

In some meetings, we have observed others who were only pretending as they rolled and laughed hysterically on the floor. I remember one young man who would stop, look around to see if he was being noticed, then close his eyes and continue.

Across from the aisle from us in another service, a lady was holding her hands up with her fingers extended. She was repeatedly jerking and violently throwing her upper body forward, and then returning to her upright position. Every few minutes, she would stop “manifesting” and check her beautiful, long, painted fingernails. Even to the point of caressing each one several times to be sure they were still smooth. It would have been funny to watch, if the implications had not been so serious.

It wasn't hard to discern (in the natural sense) that both these people were seeking to draw attention to themselves. The manifestations they were having were self-induced, conditioned reflexes of the flesh. Some of this type of manifestations are caused by self-seeking demon spirits who are distracting people from receiving what the Spirit of God is doing in that service.

When the “renewal” first started with all of these manifestations, Joyce, my wife, and I decided to attend a meeting in our area. Our desire was to know what God was doing in His church. We put praise cassettes in the player and spent several hours praying in the Spirit as we drove to the meeting. We didn't talk, or speculate on what we had heard or what we might see. We arrived about thirty minutes before the meeting was to start and approached the door the same time as another lady. Joyce spoke pleasantly to her, but, the lady turned and glared at us hatefully through beady glazed eyes, as if to say, “How dare you speak to me.” She seemed to be in a trance and with each step threw her upper body toward the floor with a spastic jerk.

The manifestations resembled a true manifestation that sometimes comes on those who are being struck by waves of the overwhelming power of God. However, Joyce and I both knew in our spirits that the manifestations this lady was having were not of God. We knew by the gift of the discerning of spirits that this was demonic. The lady needed deliverance.

As we took our seats, we watched as she positioned herself on the second row to be in the middle of what was going to happen. We were curious as to why someone didn't deal with the situation before the service started. Her distracting manifestations continued, and when the singing began, became more violent. They became so distracting that we turned in another direction and closed our eyes trying to stay in an attitude of worship.

When the singing stopped, to our absolute shock, the person in charge of the meeting invited this lady to testify how God was moving so mightily in her life. As she came forward to testify her violent spastic-like actions became even stronger. Her eyes were still glazed as if in a trance, and every word she haltingly said was accompanied by an extreme jerking motion. We could see or discern nothing in her words or actions that brought glory to God. She was a tormented, distorted human being and we were watching the overt behavior of a demon spirit.

There are no words to express the tremendous grief we felt in our spirits. The source of the manifestations was not being discerned through the gifts of the Holy Spirit by those in leadership. Instead, this lady was being held up as an example of true manifestations of the Holy Spirit. People were being encouraged to act just as she was acting.

We quietly left the meeting during a prayer that followed the “testimony.” I will never forget looking at Joyce outside the building. She was shaking from head to foot. We both began to cry out

to God for the people who were so hungry for Him that they had traveled for miles seeking His presence. They were being deceived and fed a counterfeit manifestation because there was no discerning of spirits in operation among the leadership.

Some have come under sharp criticism because, even though they will later admit they didn't feel right in their spirits about certain manifestations, they didn't want to do anything to stop them in case they were wrong. They ask, "What if it's a true manifestation of the Holy Spirit?"

When we are in a position of leadership in a meeting, sometimes God directs us to put our hands on the person manifesting and say, "What do you say to the shed blood of Jesus?" This question never bothers a person in the spirit of God. It does cause demons to react violently.

We must consider the fact that it's just as dangerous to say something is of the Holy Spirit if it's not!

If this move of God is to continue, leaders must eagerly desire, stir up and learn to boldly operate in the revelation gifts of the Holy Spirit. For this move to survive, it must be "pastored" by leaders who know and discern it after the Spirit of God. Isn't this type of problem what the apostle Paul was addressing when he wrote 1 Corinthians 13 and 14?

Almost all the manifestations of today, including laughter, weeping, falling, shaking, jerking and roaring are historic revival manifestations that have been recorded. Jonathan Edwards and other past leaders have written extensively describing them. They caused the same controversies in their day as they are today.

However, just because these manifestations occurred in past revivals does not necessarily mean that they were, or are from God. Often when the anointing of God becomes the strongest, demons begin to manifest. Isaiah wrote, "The anointing breaks the yoke ..."

In India, where people worship serpents, I have witnessed demons manifesting like serpents. In the name of Jesus, I have commanded the manifestations to stop, and the person has lain there as if unconscious until the end of the preaching. Then I could minister deliverance without distracting from the preaching or from the ministry that followed.

In other parts of Asia where people eat live monkey brains, I have seen demons manifesting like monkeys in the overwhelming presence of God.

In our meetings, when we can have teams trained ahead of time, if a demon starts to manifest and distract during the teaching, I have moved the people's attention to the opposite side of the assembly. Then the workers could quickly move the person to a separate location to minister deliverance. This keeps demons from distracting the people away from what the Spirit of God is doing.

I understand that it's now a common practice in large meetings in Argentina and other South American nations where great revival is being experienced, for trained ushers to remove people who are having demonic manifestations from the main tent. They are taken into another tent where trained teams minister deliverance.

There are times when I have witnessed overt manifestations that I knew by the discerning of spirits were not from God. However, I knew also they were not demonic. They were simply an uncontrolled emotional response from that person's soul or flesh.

Like Pavlov's dogs salivating every time he rang the bell, many immature believers have started manifesting by psychological conditioned response. They have witnessed others behaving in a certain way so they have become preconditioned to behaving, or manifesting, in the same way when they feel God's presence. Some traveling ministries have preconditioned certain anticipated responses, or manifestations, by repeatedly telling stories about what has happened in previous meetings.

Many of the manifestations being discussed today have been experienced in our meetings and in the meetings of many others since the early seventies. At times people have fallen in waves under the power of God without us even touching them. In other meetings, almost no one has fallen under the power of God.

At times, some have fallen to the floor and begun to shake or scream violently which is usually a manifestation of deliverance, and others have been gloriously delivered without any outward signs.

Holy laughter began occurring in our meetings in the early eighties. During periods of laughter many remarkable physical healings have taken place, and also deep emotional healings. Many argue, "they are just not comfortable with these manifestations." No where does the Scripture place our level of comfort as the criteria for what is of God. We must discern in the Spirit if our "discomfort" is from Him, or just a response of our own human nature. Others express fear of the unfamiliar, and strange behavior of the people. Fear of the unknown is basic to our human nature.

In Mark 4, we have the account of Jesus standing in the boat and saying, "Peace, be still!" We know the storm stopped instantly, but read on. Jesus asked the disciples why they were so fearful. Mark goes on to say, "They feared exceedingly." Did their fear mean what happened was not of God? Of course not.

This type of fear is mentioned again in the next chapter. Jesus had come into contact with the demonized man and cast all the demons into the swine. The man was normal, sitting with Jesus, but what did the people do? Did they rejoice that one of their own had been set free? No! Mark wrote, "They were afraid ... And they began to pray him to depart!" (Mark 5:15,17)

They were so afraid, they prayed Jesus would leave.

It's important that leaders discern the anointing and learn how to lead others in the anointing of the moment. There are times when the Holy Spirit will move in such an overwhelming presence that people will begin to weep.

Sometimes, many are overwhelmed and are slain in the spirit, falling to the floor under His awesome power, like on the day of the dedication of Solomon's Temple. The glory of God filled the temple and the priests couldn't even stand to minister because of the overwhelming anointing of His presence (1 Kings 8:11).

Other times, we are so overwhelmed by the glory of His presence that everyone is awe struck into stunned silence. Manifestations that are totally "in God's order" at one moment are totally "out of God's order" the next.

The answer is not to forbid all manifestations lest something happens that is "not of God." Neither is the answer to stand back and let anything happen lest we "touch" what might be anointed of God. In the revival of today, leaders must ask God for the gift of the discerning of spirits to be in operation in every meeting. They must ask God for a following word of wisdom in how to "pastor" the move of God.

We as leaders cannot judge any manifestation by what we think or feel about it in the natural. How often in the past have we been fearful about certain manifestations that we had never experienced in the church of our tradition? I can remember the fear I once had about people who spoke in tongues having been taught that "it was of the devil."

Some, who are very intellectual, analytical and cerebral in their approach to life, will stand back with a judgmental attitude saying "I just can't understand this so it must not be of God." The things of the Spirit are foolish to the natural mind (2

Corinthians 2:14). Peter's action of getting out of a boat in the middle of a storm-filled lake was certainly contrary to all that was reasonable and intelligent.

Others say, "God is not the author of confusion," so these manifestations are certainly not of God. And yet, the book of Acts is full of accounts of manifestations that occurred in the early church. They certainly would not have filled our criteria of what we would judge in the natural to be without confusion.

As balanced spiritual leaders, we must not run to the sensational, being carried about with every wind of doctrine and emotional excess. The church needs the solid teaching of God's Word as never before. The church, in addition to being a place of corporate worship and prayer, must also be the place to make disciples – for equipping believers to do the works of Jesus.

The church must continue to be focused on the continued teaching of God's Word. The greatest example of total saturation miracle evangelism in Paul's ministry was in Ephesus where God worked extraordinary or unusual miracles through the hands of Paul (Acts 19:11). This was predicated by the fact that he taught daily in the school of Tyrannus.

Unusual manifestations must not be shunned. Instead they should confirm the solid teaching and preaching of God's Word. Paul's success in ministry was not because he was in control by his own wisdom or persuasiveness but because of a demonstration of the Spirit and power of God. There were always supernatural, extraordinary manifestations of God's Spirit when Paul taught or preached the Word of God.

We, as spiritual leaders, must be mature, open, eagerly desiring to pastor and lead those entrusted to our spiritual oversight into all that God is saying and doing. At the same time, we must carefully nurture and protect the flocks from grievous wolves that would come with every wind of doctrine. To be such a spiritual leader, we must be men and women of the Spirit. We must know through the Spirit those who labor among us.

We must by faith, with confidence in our own personal relationship with God, know and discern the moves of God and any manifestations by the precious, all important supernatural gift of the discerning of spirits. By faith, we must be confident in our ability to hear from God. We, as under-shepherds, must be willing to lead our flocks with fearless confidence because we know the voice of the Great Shepherd. We must willingly submit to God's direction even if the resultant manifestations

may interrupt our own plans, or take us into uncharted waters beyond the comfort zones of our past experiences.

Spiritual leadership often means “crossing over” into the unknown as was required Moses and Joshua. It often takes the boldness and confidence of a Gideon or a David. It takes a leader who is confident in his or her ability to hear from God because of their own relationship, fellowship and daily communion with Him.

Our style of leadership must not be one of always having to be in control. We should trust Him who is the Head of the church to be in control by His Spirit. At the same time, we should be secure in our anointing and calling so that we will follow the move of the Spirit in every service.

This means we are vulnerable to making a mistake. However, if we are to walk on the supernatural waters of this present move of the Spirit, we must be willing to get out of the comfort zones of our boats. When Peter walked on the water, he may have doubted and begun to sink, but always remember, he was the disciple who walked on the water with Jesus!

As long as we stay in the comfort zones of our boats, we will continue to rationalize and try to understand what is happening with all of these historical, yet unusual manifestations of revival. How much better to ask for, believe and receive the operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. With these gifts in operation, we will know when to step back and let God be God, and when to lovingly yet forcibly keep each meeting on track with what the Spirit of God is saying and doing.