

Is it genuine revival?

Jack Sin

It is undeniable that there have been authentic revivals both in biblical times and often in church history (for example, the eighteenth-century awakening in England and America). But what about the frequent talk of 'revival' that has been circulating in Charismatic circles for the last 20 years?

From Toronto, Brownsville, Pensacola, and other places, we were for a while bombarded with so-called Holy Spirit phenomena and 'latter day rain'.

The fact is that, in these last days, believers will be exposed to spiritual charlatans and sincerely misled men, and they will need to evaluate spiritual claims and phenomena very carefully.

The following thirteen questions may help with that evaluation, to see if it really is a Holy Ghost revival.

1. Is there too much emphasis on the Holy Spirit, at the expense of Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

Does the speaker speak almost exclusively of the Spirit, and never uplift Christ or the Trinity? In the New Testament (especially John 14-16; Acts 1:8; 1 John 4-5), the Holy Spirit's main ministry is described as bearing witness to Jesus Christ.

If there is no true witness to Jesus Christ, then it is not of the Spirit. 1 John 4:1 says, 'Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world'.

2. Is there a good emphasis on Scripture? Is there solid, lively and convicting expository preaching?

Is there clear doctrinal teaching and preaching from the pulpit, or just stage showmanship and celebrity? If the Bible (and its gospel truth) is not emphasised enough, it is likely that it is man-centred religion.

There is no genuine revival without the clear preaching of the Word, and repentance and faith in Christ in response. Be alert and watchful and examine the Scriptures to see if what is preached is true (Acts 17:11).

3. Is there uncritical acceptance of whatever is going on?

1 Thessalonians 5:19-22 tells us (in the context of issues like prophecy) to test or examine everything carefully. John warns us, straight after mentioning that the Holy Spirit bears witness to Jesus, to test the spirits to see if they are from God (1 John 3:22-4:3).

Testing and examining a situation prudently is demonstrating submission to this counsel of Scripture. Believers should not be gullible and accept everything that is said.

4. Is the primary emphasis on 'God, bless me', or obedience and submission to God?

Is there a 'health and wealth' emphasis that centres on your social, physical, mental or emotional well-being?

Jesus Christ stressed the importance of obedience and self-denying surrender to God. He indicated that there will be some who mistakenly think they are right with God because of their involvement

in supernatural activities (allegedly in Christ's name). But to their horror they will find out that they were not on the same side as Christ (Matthew 7:21-27).

The centre of our faith is Christ and not our own well-being.

5. Is there an unbiblical emphasis on intense or ecstatic experiences?

For example, being 'slain in the spirit' (people falling backwards) does find a parallel in the Bible. It happened to Saul, whose heart was not right with God (1 Samuel 19:24), and to those arresting Jesus (John 18:6).

Falling backwards is certainly not normative for a Christian. And it is impossible to prove from Scripture that it is a mark of spirituality.

6. Is 'laughing in the spirit' accepted as a legitimate expression of spirituality?

Ronnie Howard Browne advocated unrestrained hilarity as a sign of the Spirit's blessing in 1994, and so publicly disgraced the church in the eyes of the unbelieving world.

There is no biblical justification for such an idea. Certainly, joy in the Lord is good (Philippians 4:4), but choosing to rejoice in the Lord reverently and prayerfully, and worship him in spirit and truth, is not the same as receiving a 'gift' of delirious, godless laughter.

Such irreverent behaviour incurs ridicule and dishonour for God's name. 'The joy of the Lord is your strength' (Nehemiah 8:10) was said in the context of a repentant, revived post-exilic Jewish community who had been weeping over their failures and sins.

Such texts taken out of context cannot justify foolish behaviour during worship.

7. Is there an emphasis on 'manifestations'?

How much is vision, dream and prophecy promoted? How much time in the worship service is devoted to ecstatic experience? Is there clear biblical teaching on the cessation of sign gifts like tongue-speaking (see Hebrews 2:1-4, for example)? Are tongues-speaking, visions and prophecy given more emphasis than Christ and his Word?

8. Is 'prophecy' used to 'heavy shepherd' and spiritually blackmail worshippers?

There is a central place in the church for the authoritative preaching of God's Word (1 Corinthians 1:21-23). But 'prophecy' which rails against people and churches because they do not 'go with the flow' is highly suspect.

We are not to believe a different gospel, even if presented by an angel (Galatians 1:6-9). Nor are we to be deceived by those who derive their authority solely from their experiences (Colossians 2:18).

9. Is the worship ascetic or mystical in orientation?

Remember, when God created the material universe it was good (Genesis 1). It is not the physical which is evil, but its abuse. Similarly, it is not just the 'spiritual' which is good, but the proper use of the spiritual.

Beware of mystical or emotional experiences in religion that are at root unbiblical. Objective faith in God, and not subjective feelings, should rule our worship.

10. Is there an undue emphasis on the sensational?

Personal experience of Christ is crucial, and God works with people as individuals in a way that they experience, but are we ultimately basing our faith on personal experiences or on the authority of God's inerrant, sufficient Word?

Do not let your heart be ruled merely by the sensational — which is always unreliable and liable to change. God gave us the Scriptures to teach us how to live godly lives (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

11. Is the bizarre being confused with the supernatural?

God certainly did some supernatural things in the Bible. But some things in the Bible were never intended to be normative for Christian experience. Miracles, signs and healings were normative for Christ and the apostles, but not for ordinary believers today.

The Bible alone is our only infallible rule for faith and conduct. If something is in the Bible, study it in context. Do not let the supernatural supplant normative Christian living in daily obedience and trust in God.

12. Are deeper commitments to God being confused with conversions?

Deeper commitment to God is wonderful. May God draw all of us closer to Christ and mould us into his image! But it is misleading to use statistics on commitments as numbers converted; they are not the same thing. We need to know the correct biblical doctrine of salvation and not be confused by false teachers.

13. Can the dramatic claims be substantiated?

Are the claims for so-called prophecies, visions, healings and numbers converted capable of being verified objectively? Are they exaggerated, or subjectively construed by excited people? It is much easier to seem to 'cure' backache or headaches than restore amputated limbs or heal total blindness!

I heard someone claim that his pastor resurrected a dead person. When asked for concrete evidence, he shied away and said he didn't want to boast about it. So he would not state the facts.

The Healing Epidemic (Dr Peter Masters; Wakeman Trust) explains that many of these so-called healings have not been authenticated and are highly questionable.

We are living in days of counterfeit and deception, even in the religious and 'evangelical' world. Regenerate people need to be careful and discerning, yet not cynical and sceptical for the wrong reasons. Pray that we may have the wisdom and discernment to know the difference.

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