

To Be Continued...

The Holy Spirit & His Gifts

The story I'm about to read is old - about two years old, to be exact.

Todd Bentley... heals people by kicking them, claiming his violence will cure them of diseases. He claims to have cured a man of cancer by punching him in the chest. He shoved/healed a congregant so hard that the man lost a tooth. One Youtube video features him saying, "And I'm thinking why is the power of God not moving? And God said, "Because you haven't kicked that woman in the face." So, he did and, "I inched closer and I went bam! And just as my boot made contact with her nose, she fell under the power of God."

(After a brief period of retirement connected with the breakdown of his marriage and subsequent re-marriage, he has returned to ministry).

Things could get pretty wild at the worship services in the first century church in the city of Corinth. In chapter fourteen the apostle Paul says to them,

1Corinthians 14:23 Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, **will they not say that you are out of your mind?**

Other translations say things like, "Won't they think you are crazy" (CEV), "will they not say that you are demented" (AV), and "will they not say the ye are mad" (KJV).

Madness was unacceptable to Paul. It was not compatible with the Christian faith. It was unworthy of Jesus Christ.

Over the years many individuals have described to me their experiences in churches where everyone seemed to lose control.

Madness... Not compatible with Christianity... Not worthy of Jesus.

To those acting as though they were out of their minds, Paul graciously says,

1Corinthians 12:1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant:

1 Corinthians 12:2 You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led.

1 Corinthians 12:3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

Their madness when exercising the gifts is given perspective. It had to do with what they had practiced in their previous pagan religions as they worshipped "dumb idols." They carried into the church baggage from paganism that had no place in the worship of the one true God.

The exercise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit should not be anything like that - not in character, not in content. And that's the first, foundational point Paul makes in these three verses.

1Corinthians 12:1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant:

For sure, he did not want them to be "ignorant" of the proper manifestations and exercising of "spiritual gifts." But there's something more to this.

In these verses he gives them the reason why their exercise of the gifts is flawed. He explains it to them by appealing to their background.

Before we get to their background, let me make an important observation. This opening verse is very important because it lets us know that our understanding of the Holy Spirit, of His gifts, and of their operation in the church, is expounded to us in the Bible.

Let me put it another way. No matter what I may think about the Holy Spirit and His gifts, and no matter what I have experienced or desire to experience, it must be something I can find or defend from the Word of God.

The same Holy Spirit giving me gifts, and energizing them, inspired the writers of the Bible. There can be no contradiction between His exposition and the experience.

This cannot be overstressed. Too much of what happens in charismatic churches is just contrary to what the Bible teaches.

But, likewise, cessationists either ignore or reinterpret teaching on the gifts in order to deny their continuation in the church.

Now, obviously, everyone will say they submit to the Bible as their final authority. It's up to each of us to study it out for ourselves.

1 Corinthians 12:2 You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led.

The Gentile believers at Corinth had been saved out of Greek mystery religions in which wild spiritual experiences were considered normal. These people were accustomed to being "carried away" in experiences that were called either *ecstasies* or *enthusiasms*.

- "Ecstasies" were supernatural contacts with the pagan deities. Through frenzied hypnotic chants and ceremonies the worshippers experienced semiconscious euphoric trances.
- "Enthusiasms" involved chanting, divination, and dreams.

Ecstasies and enthusiasms were coveted spiritual experiences. In them you were carried away by the power of the deity - whom we would see as a demon - having no control over what you said or did.

I'm not going too far to suggest that as pagans they were in contact with demons. Paul said something similar earlier in this letter:

1Corinthians 10:20 Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons.

Listen to these quotes, giving you a better idea of just what we mean. Bear in mind, these are some of the milder quotes.

Greeks considered madness an important aspect of worship. Women in particular responded to Bacchus (also known as Dionysus), the god of madness; 'him of the orgiastic cry, exciter of women, Dionysus, glorified with mad honors.'

There was also a tradition that women during the course of the worship tore apart young animals and ate them raw, warm and bleeding, thereby receiving within themselves the life of the god.

Apart from savagery and shouting, ancient writers usually describe worshipers of Dionysus as engaging in dancing, drinking, sexual promiscuity, varying degrees of undress, and other forms of excessive behavior. It was only in frenzy that one could hold communion with the god, or - in ecstasy so great that the soul seemed to leave the body - to become one with him.

There are references to women worshipping "by means of war-dances accompanied by uproar and noise and cymbals and drums and also by flute."

http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/sumer_anunnaki/reptiles/reptiles11.htm

By the way, this helps us understand Paul's later exhortations directed especially to the gals about their proper conduct in the worship services of the church.

It also relates to his comments to open chapter thirteen, namely, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal." They were familiar with these unintelligible sounds from their pagan days.

The Corinthians brought this background into the church. They were used to being carried away in their worship, having no control over what they said or did. They associated this lack of control with deep spirituality.

We might say that they thought that any so-called spiritual experience was good insofar as it was evidence of contact with God.

I know people like that. As long as something happens, they are satisfied God 'visited' them.

Paul was already preparing them for a principle he will preach throughout these chapters - namely, that what counts is that the believer remain in control and that the experiences be intelligible, contain proper biblical content, and be in character with the holiness of Jesus.

1 Corinthians 12:3 Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

His "therefore" lets us know he is concluding his opening comments and is making application of the facts he's just presented to them about their former worship experiences.

"I make known to you" recalls his statement, "I don't want you to be ignorant." In other words, there can be no disagreement with Paul on this point.

"No one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit."

Was someone actually saying Jesus was accursed? Probably not. But, as we've seen, some of their previous pagan behavior had been as outrageous as a Christian saying, "Jesus is accursed." I think Paul's point is that in their former worship of idols, you never knew what a person might say or do.

That's never the case if your worship is truly being led by God the Holy Spirit.

Let me put it another way. If Paul were to ask any of them, "Is it possible for you, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, to call Jesus "accursed"?, they would all say, "No!"

It establishes two things:

1. It establishes that the Holy Spirit cannot contradict Himself.
2. It establishes that a Christian doesn't lose control.

And that is the point throughout Paul's teaching on the gifts. They already believed it; they just didn't practice it.

You might think that anyone can say the words, "Jesus is Lord," whether they mean them or not. In the first century, when annually you had to declare that "Caesar is Lord" and swear allegiance to him, these words took on a more powerful meaning.

The same Spirit of God who emboldened these believers to defy Rome by refusing to swear allegiance to Caesar over Jesus Christ would never lead them to do anything that would hurt the testimony of Christ.

Which brings us back full-circle to the fact that, in Corinth, both nonbelievers and young believers thought they were mad... demented... crazy. They **were** hurting the testimony of Christ. Period.

We all bring baggage to our understanding of the proper exercise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Some are more heavy-laden than others.

All of us need to, as much as possible, hear what the Spirit is saying to our church.