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"PROTECTION FROM DECEPTION"
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Navigating Through The Minefield Of Signs And Wonders

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Chapter 1

Signs and Wonders Do Not Determine Truth

There has been in recent years a worldwide explosion of signs and wonders. Some have been biblical and helpful. Othe rs have been bizarre and unbiblical. Signs and wonders are not new. They are recorded in various passages of the Bible and in different periods of church history. However, the current explosion extends more widely than any particular churc h or denomination and has attracted widespread attention in both the religious and the secular media.
I want to make it plain that I have no personal prejudice or anxiety concerning unusual manifestations. In actual fact, I ha ve in my own lifetime experienced quite a number of them. They do not frighten me. I am not negative about them. As I r ecorded in my booklet Uproar in the Church, my own personal encounter with Jesus in World War II began in a very unc onventional way. In the middle of the night, in a barrack room of the British Army, I spent more than an hour on my back on the floor, with my body first racked by convulsive sobs and then filled with a river of laughter which grew continually lo uder.

Next morning, I found myself a completely different person, changed not by any act of my will but by yielding to the supe rnatural power that had flowed through me. I then looked up various passages in the Bible that speak about laughter. To my surprise, I discovered that - for God's people - laughter is not primarily, as we imagine, a reaction to something comic al, but rather an expression of triumph over our enemies.

In Psalm 2:4, David actually depicts God Himself as laughing: He who sits in the heavens shall laugh: The Lord shall hol d them in derision, Here, God's laughter is not a reaction to some comedy that is being enacted on earth. Rather, it is Hi s response to the ridiculous human midgets who have the effrontery to oppose His purposes. It is His expression of triu mph over all the forces of evil.

Sometimes, God fills us with His own laughter that we may share in His triumph over those who are both His enemies a nd ours.

Later I pastored a fellowship in London that met on the top floor of a five- story building. One evening a lame man was m iraculously healed and threw away his crutches. We all burst into spontaneous praise. At that moment the building bega n to tremble and shake with the power of God. The praise and shaking continued for about thirty minutes.

I realized that something similar was recorded of the early church in Acts 4:31: And when they had prayed, the place wh ere they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

At that particular time, our fellowship was conducting several evangelistic meetings each week in the streets of London, and we certainly needed more than natural boldness.

But with regard to any kind of manifestation, there are two questions that I always want to ask. Number one: Is it a manif estation of the Holy Spirit of God? Or is it a manifestation from some other source? And number two (and this is related t o it): Is the manifestation in question in harmony with Scripture? In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul says, All Scripture is given by in spiration of God. In other words, the Holy Spirit is the author of all Scripture, and He never says or does anything to cont radict Himself. Every genuine manifestation of the Holy Spirit will, in some way. harmonize with Scripture.

Now, I want to begin with some warnings of Jesus, particularly related to the end time period in which I believe we are liv ing. These are warnings against deception. They are found in Matthew chapter 24, verses 4, 5, 11 and 24. In other word s, four times in 21 verses, Jesus specifically warns us against deception in this period of the close of the age. The first th ing Jesus said about the events leading up to His return, in Matthew 24:4: "Take heed that no one deceives you." Verse 5: "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Messiah (Christ),' and will deceive many." Verse 11: "Then many f alse prophets will rise up and deceive many." And then in verse 24: "For false messiahs (christs) and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect." So, Jesus warns us four times against de ception. Anybody who shrugs off that warning or treats it lightly does so at the risk of his own soul. The greatest single d anger in this end time is not sickness, nor poverty, nor persecution. It is deception. If anybody says, "It could never happ en to me," it has already happened to that person, because that person is saying something could never happen that Je sus said would happen. That is a sufficient indication that such a person is deceived.

Next, I want to say something important about signs and wonders. They do not determine truth. It is very essential to un derstand that. Signs and wonders do not determine truth! Truth is already determined and established, and it is the Wor d of God. In John 17:17, Jesus is praying to the Father, and He says, "Your word is truth." And in Psalm 119:89, the psal mist said, Forever, 0 Lord, Your word is settled in heaven. Nothing that happens on earth can ever change the smallest l ittle sign or letter of the Word of God. It is forever settled in heaven.

Now, the Bible speaks about signs and wonders. It says some things about them that are good, and some that are very f rightening. I want to turn to 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 and read a few verses there, beginning at verse 9. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

So, Paul says here there are such things as lying signs and wonders. There are true signs and there are lying signs. Tru e signs attest the truth. Lying signs attest lies. Satan is fully capable of supernatural signs and wonders. Unfortunately, many in the Charismatic movement have the attitude that if something is supernatural, it must be from God. There is no scriptural basis for that assumption. Satan is perfectly capable of producing powerful signs and wonders to attest his lies , and the reason such people are deceived is because they did not receive the love of the truth. On such people God will send strong delusion. That is one of the most frightening statements in the Bible. If God sends you strong delusion, you will be deluded. I think that is one of the most severe judgments of God recorded in Scripture, sending these people stro ng delusion. They will be condemned, these people, because they did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteo usness.

Therefore, signs and wonders are not a guarantee that something is the truth. There is only one sure way to know the tr uth. It is in the Word of God. Jesus said in John 8:32, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Ther e is no other way to be sure that we can escape deception in these days except that we know and apply the truth of God 's Word, the Scripture.

In 1994, for the first time, I was brought into fairly direct contact with one of the groups where those manifestations were occurring. A group of leaders went to some of their meetings and returned all excited, saying they had experienced som ething wonderful and we all needed to experience it. They said, "Now, you don't test it. You don't try it out. You don't exa mine it. You just open up to it and receive it." That was the first time that I really began to be suspicious of some of these things, because such a statement is directly contrary to Scripture.

In I Thessalonians 5:21, Paul says to Christians, Test all things: hold fast what is good. So, if we do not test things, we a re disobeying Scripture, and anybody who tells us not to test things is, himself, not in harmony with Scripture. Our hearts cannot be relied upon to give us the truth. Proverbs 28:26 says, He who trusts in his own heart is a fool. So do not be a f ool. Do not trust your own heart. Do not rely upon what your heart tells you, because it is not reliable. Again, in Jeremiah 17:9 the prophet says, The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

That word deceitful in the Hebrew is a very interesting word. In 1946, I was attending the Hebrew University in Jerusale m as a guest student studying the nature - or the law - of the Hebrew language. I was listening to the head professor in t his field at that time talking about this verse: Jeremiah 17:9: The heart is deceitful above all things. He gave reasons whi ch I cannot carry over from Hebrew to show that this form of the word deceitful is active, not passive. It does not mean th at your heart is deceived. It means that your heart deceives you, so you cannot trust your own heart.

The professor gave a very vivid picture of what it means to find out the truth about your own heart. He said it is like some one peeling an onion. You peel off skin after skin, but you never know when you have reached the last skin - and all the time your eyes are watering. So that has remained with me now for 50 years - such a vivid, scriptural warning against rel ying on my own heart to tell me the truth. There is only one source of truth, and that is the Scripture.

Mixture Produces Confusion and Division

Now, I would like to give briefly my summation of this whole phenomenon /movement/whatever-you-want-to-call-it, base d partly on personal observation and partly on what I believe to be reliable reports. My summation is very simple: it is a mixture of spirits, both the Holy Spirit and unholy spirits. They are mixed together.

In Leviticus 19:19, God warns us against mixture. He is opposed to mixture. God says this, "You shall keep My statutes. You shall not let your livestock breed with another kind. You shall not sow your field with mixed seed. Nor shall a garme nt of mixed linen and wool come upon you." So, God warns against three things: breeding mixed livestock, sowing with mixed seed and wearing a mixed garment.

We could say that sowing with mixed seed represents the message that we bring, when it is partly truth and partly error. Wearing a mixed garment would be like a lifestyle that is partly scriptural and partly of this world. And letting livestock br eed with livestock of an incompatible kind would be equivalent to a Christian ministry or group aligning itself with a group or ministry that is non-Christian.

It is an interesting thing about such breeding; its product is always sterile. For instance, you can mate a horse with a don key and the product is a mule. But a mule is always sterile; it cannot reproduce. I think that is one reason why there are so many "sterile" operations in Christendom - they are being bred with the wrong mate.

Now, I have observed this carefully, and I have had grievous experience of this condition of a mixture of spirits. I find tha t it is something which the Scripture warns us against. For instance, there is a character in the Bible, King Saul, who had a mixture of spirits. At one time, he prophesied in the Holy Spirit; at another time, he prophesied in a demon. His career i s really a warning. He was a king who ruled for forty years. He was a successful military commander. He had a lot of suc cesses. But mixture was his undoing, and his life closed with tragedy. On the last night of his life, he went to consult a wi tch, and the next day he committed suicide on the battlefield. Surely that offers no encouragement to any of us to cultivat e any kind of spiritual mixture in our lives.

I have observed that the result of mixture is two things: first of all, confusion; and then division. For instance, we have thi s mixed message, part of which is true, part of which is false. People can respond in two ways. Some will see the good a nd focus on it, and therefore accept the bad. Some will focus on the bad, and therefore reject the good. In either case, it does not accomplish God's purposes.

Once upon a time I was a pastor, a long time ago, but I remember that the most difficult kind of people to deal with were people who were a mixture. I will give you a little imaginary example. We have Sister Jones in our congregation. One Su nday she gives a beautiful, prophetic message and everybody is uplifted, excited. But two Sundays later, she stands up and gives a revelation which she had in a dream. The further she goes with this revelation, the more confused and confu sing it becomes. Eventually, as pastor, I have to say to her, "Sister Jones, I thank you, but I really don't believe that is fro m the Lord," and she sits down - but that is not the end. After the meeting, Sister White comes to me and says, "Brother Prince, how could you talk to Sister Jones like that? Don't you remember that beautiful prophecy she gave two Sundays ago?" And when Sister White is gone, Brother Black comes to me, and he says, "If that's the kind of revelation she has, I won't listen to any more of her prophecies!"

So, you see what we have? Confusion, and out of confusion, division. I believe that is exactly what is happening in the c hurch: confusion resulting in division. Certainly there is tremendous division! I believe confusion will always produce divi sion.

The Bible gives us no liberty to tolerate the incursion of evil into the church. We are not to be passive; we are not to be neutral. Proverbs 8:13 says, The fear of the Lord is to hate evil. It is sinful to compromise with evil. It is sinful to be neutral toward evil. In John 10:10 Jesus spoke about the thief, the devil, who comes: to steal, to kill and to destroy. We always need to remember, whether it is in an individual life or in a congregation, the devil only comes with three objectives: to steal, to kill and to destroy. I can remember many times I have been speaking with a person who needed deliverance from an evil spirit, and I have said to that person, "Remember, the devil has three reasons for being in your life: to steal, to kill and to destroy. You need to take a stand against him, not be neutral - you must drive him out." What is true of an individual is true of a congregation. It is true for the body of Christ, worldwide.

Some of these unusual manifestations have been compared with unusual manifestations that accompanied the ministry of John Wesley, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards and Charles Finney. Undoubtedly there were unusual manifestations in the ministries of those four men, and I have studied some of them myself, but I think the differences are greater than the similarities with the present situation. Let me point out to you three differences:

First of all, all those men majored on the strong preaching of God's Word. They hardly did anything until they had preached the Word of God, or apart from the preaching of the Word of God. Finney, himself, commented somewhere about his ministry, "I usually spoke an hour or two." I do not know how many contemporary Christians in the West would listen to a two-hour sermon, but Finney gave the Word in its purity and in its power.

Second difference: All those men made a strong call for repentance. That was their primary demand on the people to whom they ministered. Some people call what we are seeing today "a refreshing," but in Acts 3:19 Peter says that refreshing must be preceded by repentance. Any refreshing that bypasses repentance is not scriptural. The third difference is that in the ministry of those men, there is no record as far as I know that any of them laid hands on people. I am not saying that it is unscriptural to lay hands on people, but there is a difference. There is a situation in which people receive directly for themselves from the preached Word and another situation in which people have hands laid on them by others. If I could take a simple example. It is like rain. If you are out in the open and the rain falls upon you, you have received your rain direct from heaven. But, on the other hand, if rain is caught and stored in some kind of a cistern, then you are not receiving that rain direct from heaven. You have to take into account the cistern and the pipes through which you receive the rain. This is very vivid for me, because my first wife, Lydia, and I lived in Kenya for five years in a house where our water came from rain caught on the roof and channeled into concrete cisterns. Although the water came from heaven, we quickly learned by experience that if it stayed for any length of time in the cistern, worms developed in it and, consequently, we always had to boil our drinking water. There was nothing wrong with the rain as it came down, but something happened in the channel through which the rain came to us, and it was no longer pure. I think this can be true of laying on of hands. It is a channel which is not always pure.

Recently some ministers have moved from actually laying on hands to some other action of the hands - such as waving or pointing. However, this does not change the fact that something is being transmitted through the hands. Otherwise, there is no reason to use the hands at all. The important question still remains: Are those hands pure channels through which only the Holy Spirit can flow?

For instance, Ruth and I were in a meeting fairly recently where ministers deeply involved in the current move were speaking. We were sitting about two rows behind a woman who was having a terrible experience. She was like somebody continually trying to burp or trying to vomit, and she just went on and on and on. Eventually, I said to Ruth, "I think we ought to try to help her." So, although it was not a meeting for which we were responsible, we went over quietly and started to talk to her. We discovered very quickly that she was speaking in a tongue, but for both of us it was evident that it was a false tongue; it was not a Holy Spirit tongue. We challenged her to confess that Jesus is Lord, and she was not willing or able to say that. So I conclude that she had a false spirit.

Later on, the people who were with her came over and talked to us and asked us what they should do about it. I asked them, "How did it happen?" And they said, "Well, she went to a church that's involved in this move and somebody laid hands on her and this is the way she has been since then. But," they said, "she's convinced it's from God. We can't help her." That is just an example of "rain" that came through a "cistern" that was not pure.

Also, in the present move, there is a great deal of emphasis on love. I agree that love is the greatest thing. But the trouble is that people are not always clear about the nature of love as it is described in the New Testament. First of all, love in us is expressed by obedience to the Lord. Any kind of love that does not result in obedience is unscriptural love.

In John 14:15, Jesus said to His disciples, "If you love Me, keep My commandments," or, in a perhaps better text, "You will keep My commandments." In other words, what is the evidence that you love Him? The evidence is keeping His commandments. Then in verse 21a. Jesus says, "He who has My commandments and keeps them. it is he who loves Me." And in 1 John 5:3, it says, For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. Therefore, any kind of love that does not result in obedience to the will of God revealed in His Word is not scriptural love. It is a counterfeit, a substitute for the real thing. Then, we need to consider the way that God expresses His love toward us. True, God is our Father, and He loves us. But as a Father, if necessary, He is prepared to discipline us. In the messages to the seven churches depicted in Revelation, I would say that Laodicea is probably the one that corresponds most closely to the contemporary church in the West. And to that church the Lord said, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent" (Rev. 3:19).

So, God's love is not sloppy. It is not sentimental. It is right down-to- earth. If we are straying from His ways and if we are disobedient, His love is expressed in rebuking us and chastening us, and He commands us to repent. Once again we have the problem of trying to get what God promises, but bypassing the basic condition of repentance - which is a deception.

I recently read the following comment by a British Bible teacher: Some Christians take the text "God is love" and turn it around to mean "Love is God." In other words, nothing can be wrong if it is rooted in love. However, any love that comes between us and God is an illegitimate love ... Likewise any love that diverts us from obedience to God's Word is illegitimate.

The Identity of the Holy Spirit

In all of this that we are speaking about. this worldwide phenomenon, I believe there is one, central, underlying issue, which is often obscured. In fact, very seldom do we come really to grips with this issue.This issue is the identity of the Holy Spirit. How do we recognize the Holy Spirit? How do we know what the Holy Spirit is like? And how do we distinguish the Holy Spirit from other spirits? I read a statement recently by some New-Ager in which she said about the "New Age," " When the holy spirit comes, then the New Age will be here." Of course I am sure most of you would understand that when she talks about the holy spirit, she is not talking about the same Holy Spirit that the Bible speaks about. This is one of various indications that there is a counterfeit holy spirit. It is nothing new for Satan to produce a religious counterfeit. Since the time of Jesus, history records a whole series of counterfeit messiahs who have risen among the Jewish people. All of them had a following. Some like Sabbetai Zvi, had a widespread and enduring influence. The latest of them died in 1994.

Another religious counterfiet is the being titled the "blessed virgin Mary." With all the claims that have been made for her and all the titles that have been ascribed to her, she bears no resemblance to the humble Jewish maiden who became the mother of Jesus, and later of His brothers and sisters. Yet over the centuries this counterfeit has claimed the devotion of millions of sincere Christians. We need to be on our guard, therefore, that we do not entertain a counterfeit "holy spirit. " I want to suggest to you three ways to identify the Holy Spirit, to recognize who the Holy Spirit is.

The first way I refer to in my little booklet Uproar in the Church, which I wrote about two years ago. I will just quote a few paragraphs: Another danger that threatens those who minister in the supernatural realm is the temptation to use spiritual gifts to manipulate or exploit or dominate people. At one period in my ministry I found myself casting spirits of witchcraft out of church-going people. Eventually, I asked the Lord to show me the true nature of witchcraft. I believe the Lord gave me the following definition: Witchcraft is the attempt to control people and get them to do what you want by the use of any spirit that is not the Holy Spirit. After I had digested this, the Lord added: And if anyone has a spirit that he can use, it is not the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God, and no one uses God. That is very important. The Holy Spirit is God, and no one uses God. Then I went on to say, Today I tremble inwardly when I see or hear of a person who claims that he has spiritual gifts which he is free to use just as he pleases. It is surely no accident that some of those who have made such claims have ended in serious doctrinal error.

It is important to see that there is a difference between the Holy Spirit Himself, as a Person, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In Romans 11:29, Paul tells us that the gifts ... of God are irrevocable. In other words, once God has given us a gift, He never takes it back. We are free to use it, not to use it, or to misuse it. But even if we misuse it, God does not take it back. Otherwise it would not be a genuine gift, it would only be a conditional loan.

It is a fact that people do misuse gifts of the Holy Spirit. Paul provides a clear example in I Corinthians 13:1: Though I sp

eak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. O bviously the Holy Spirit Himself does not become a clanging cymbal. But the gift of speaking in tongues - when misused - can become an empty, discordant noise. Unfortunately this often happens in Pentecostal and Charismatic circles.

I believe it is possible to misuse other spiritual gifts - such as a word of knowledge or a gift of healing. This can happen when a person uses a spiritual gift to achieve a result or promote a movement which is not in harmony with the will of Go d. One obvious misuse would be for personal gain. In such a situation, our safeguard is to be able to recognize the Holy Spirit as a Person and to distinguish between Him and His gifts. This, then, is the first and most important fact about the Holy Spirit: HE IS GOD. And we need to relate to Him and treat Him always as God.

The second fact about the Holy Spirit is that He is the servant of God the Father and God the Son. This is an exciting rev elation because it gives such a high value to servanthood. Many people today despise the idea of being a servant. They feel it is demeaning and undignified to be a servant. But I think it is wonderful that servanthood did not begin on earth. It began in eternity and it began in God. God the Holy Spirit is the Servant of the Father and the Son. This does not demea n Him or make Him less than God. But it is a fact that we have to recognize about Him, which directs His activities and t he things He does. In John 16:13-14 Jesus gives us a glimpse of the Holy Spirit's ministry and activity: "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth: for He will not speak on His own authority but whatever He hears He will speak: and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declar e it to you." So we see: the Holy Spirit does not speak from Himself; He has no message of His own. Isn't that remarkabl e? He only reports to us what He is hearing from the Father and the Son. Secondly, His aim is not to glorify Himself, nor to attract attention to Himself, but always He glorifies and focuses attention on Jesus. That is the second important way t o identify the Holy Spirit.

Now, I want you to listen to this carefully, because it is revolutionary. Any spirit that focuses on the Holy Spirit and glorifi es the Holy Spirit is not the Holy Spirit. It is contrary to His whole nature and purpose. Once you have grasped that, it will open your eyes to many things which are going on in the church that are otherwise difficult to understand. For example, we have a very beautiful chorus that we sing about the Father, the Son and the Spirit. The first verse says to the Father, "Glorify Thy name in all the earth." The second verse says to Jesus the Son, "Glorify Thy name in all the earth." The thir d verse says to the Spirit, "Glorify Thy name in all the earth." I love to sing the first two verses, but I decline to sing the th ird verse, because I do not believe it is scriptural. The Holy Spirit never does glorify His own name. His purpose is to glor ify the One who sent Him.

Let me make another statement which may surprise you. I have not found in the Scripture anywhere an example of a pr ayer addressed to the Holy Spirit. So far as I can understand, no one in the Scripture ever prayed to the Holy Spirit. You probably would do well to check that for yourself, but I have looked carefully and have not found one example. You migh t ask, "Why so?" And I would give you this answer: It is a question of heavenly "protocol." There is so little respect nowa days for protocol on earth that we sometimes do not realize that there is protocol in heaven. It is protocol relating to a m aster-servant relationship. In such a relationship, when you are dealing with a servant, you do not speak to the servant, but to the master. You ask the master to tell his servant what to do. It is wrong to directly address a servant when his ma ster is available for you to speak to. I believe that is heaven's protocol. When you recognize the relationship of the Holy Spirit to God the Father and God the Son, you understand that we never give orders to the Holy Spirit. When we want th e Holy Spirit to do something, we address our request to the Father or to the Son.

When I was looking through this, I found a passage in Ezekiel chapter 37 which I thought, at first, was an exception. It is part of Ezekiel's well-known vision of the valley full of dry bones with no life in them. First of all, he prophesied and the b ones came together, but they were still lifeless corpses. Then, in verses 9 and 10: Also He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Come from the four winds, 0 breath, an d breathe on these slain, that they may live."'" So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and t hey lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army.

So, I thought that the "breath" is really a picture of the wind - or the Holy Spirit - and so Ezekiel was praying to the wind. But he was not praying. He was prophesying. And it did not come from himself. He merely passed on to the wind a com mand that he had received from God Himself. Therefore, as far as I have been able to discover, there is not a single exa mple anywhere in the Scripture of praying to the Holy Spirit. Now, I am not seeking to make a big issue out of that. On th e other hand, I think it is very important as we try to discern the nature and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. You would say to me, "Well, doesn't God hear our prayer when we pray to the Holy Spirit?" I think He does. But we are not praying in ful l accord with heaven's protocol. If we really want to please the Lord and show respect for Him, we will show respect for His protocol.

The third important fact about the Holy Spirit is what is indicated in His name: He is Holy. This is His primary title: the Hol y Spirit. In Hebrew it is the Spirit of Holiness. He has many other titles: for instance, the Spirit of Grace, the Spirit of Trut h, the Spirit of Power, and so on, But they are all subsidiary. His name and His primary title is the Holy Spirit. Anything th at is unholy does not proceed from the Holy Spirit.

The Scripture also speaks of the beauty of holiness. There is a beauty in holiness when it proceeds from the Holy Spirit. It is not necessarily external. It may be internal beauty. For instance, in I Peter 3:4, Peter speaks about the hidden perso n of the heart, and he speaks about the adornment of a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price. This is not external beauty. It is internal beauty, which comes from the Holy Spirit. I want to say, however, with the utmos t emphasis: Anything unholy or ugly does not proceed from the Holy Spirit.

I will give you a list of 12 adjectives, all of which I believe cannot be applied to the Holy Spirit or to anything that is the pr oduct of the Holy Spirit. As I go through the list, I suggest you check mentally and see if you agree with me. Here, then, are words that would never apply to the Holy Spirit:

self-exalting

self-assertive

degrading

flippant

rude

sham

vulgar

indecent

insensitive

stupid

silly

degraded

I have in my heart, if God wills and I live, to write a book at some time of which I have already chosen the title. The title i s this: Holiness Is Not Optional. Only God knows whether I will ever succeed in writing the book, but I want to say, in any case, that the title states the exact truth. In the Christian life, holiness is not optional. Many Christians seem to think abo ut holiness as if it is like something added to a car, such as fancy leather upholstery instead of the normal kind of plastic. But that is not true. Holiness is an essential part of salvation. In Hebrews 12:14 the writer says, Pursue peace with all pe ople, and holiness, without which no man will see the Lord. What salvation do we have that does not bring us to see the Lord? But without holiness, no one will see the Lord.

We have in our contemporary Western Christianity a very incomplete picture of salvation. "If I get saved and born again, and then I want to go on and be holy. I can do it - but it is an option." I want to tell you that your salvation depends on yo ur being holy. And holiness comes only from the Holy Spirit.

There are many features of purported moves of the Holy Spirit that I could pick out and hold up as examples of things th at are not holy. But I will only deal with one, and that is: animal behavior in human beings attributed to the Holy Spirit. Th ere are many such examples, some I have witnessed and some have been reported.

First of all, there is no passage in Scripture that I know of where the Holy Spirit causes any human being to behave like an animal. There is the example of Balaam, but that is a strong contrast. God caused Balaam's donkey to speak like a m

an - but He never caused Balaam to bray like a donkey!

There was one man whom God caused to behave like an animal: Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws. (Daniel 4:33) But that was God's judgment, not His blessing! Revelation 4:6-8 depicts four living creatures that surround the throne of God. Three are there as representatives of the "animal" kingdom: a lion, a calf and an eagle. But none of them make noises that express their "animal" nature. All of them alike proclaim the holiness of God in pure and beautiful speech. It is important to understand that there is an order in God's creation.

Man was created in the image and likeness of God to exercise authority over the animal kingdom (see Genesis 1:26). Man is, in fact, the highest order of the creation described in the opening chapters of Genesis. This has a bearing on the way the Holy Spirit blesses us. He uplifts those whom He blesses. He will at times cause an animal to act in some ways like a human being. But He will never degrade a human being by causing him to act like an animal.

I have a certain amount of experience in this area because I have encountered animal spirits many times in Africa. I recall one particular deliverance service that I held in Zambia with about 7,000 Africans present. When I had finished the teaching and began to command the evil spirits to manifest themselves and come out of the people, there were all sorts of animal spirits that were let loose. By "animal spirits" I mean evil, demonic spirits that enter human beings and cause them to behave like animals. The first thing that happened was that a man with a "lion spirit" tried to charge me. But someone tripped him up and he did not reach me. You need to know that the reason these Africans in this part of Africa have so many animal spirits is because many of them are hunters of animals. They have this superstition that in order to hunt an animal successfully, you have to get the spirit of the animal in you. So a man tends to have the spirit of the animal which he seeks to hunt. For instance, the man who is hunting a lion, will get a lion spirit.

There are many others. We dealt with spirits of wild boars that caused people to burrow in the earth with their noses like a wild boar rooting for something. Then there were many snake spirits. These were mainly in women, and when they were manifested, the women were flat on their bellies slithering around like snakes. All these I actually witnessed myself.

There was one other spirit that I did not witness, but heard about from the missionary couple who organized the meeting. Later I met the lady concerned. She was a very sweet Christian lady - a school teacher - but her husband was an elephant hunter. When she came to the missionary couple for deliverance, they commanded the elephant spirit to come out. Immediately she dropped on her hands and knees, crawled out through an open door, put her forehead up against a small tree, and began to try to push it down. Wasn't that remarkable? Perhaps some well-meaning Western Christian might have said, "Our sister is pushing a tree down for Jesus," but that was not the explanation. The elephant spirit in her was causing her to do what elephants regularly do, which is push down trees with their foreheads. As soon as she was delivered from that spirit, she no longer had any urge to push trees down with her forehead. In the West, we sometimes tend to speak about the people in Africa as unsophisticated and to consider ourselves more sophisticated. However, I think in this realm of animal spirits it is we, in the West, who are unsophisticated and the Africans who are sophisticated. They have lived for generations with such spirits, but until the gospel came, with the power of the name of Jesus and the Word of God, they had no way to deal with them. Thank God that many of them now know how to deal with them!

Another example of which various reports have been given is people behaving like dogs. I am a dog lover, but I think dogs should be kept in their rightful place. I do not believe that the Holy Spirit ever causes anybody to bark or to run around like a dog.

Where such manifestations of animal spirits have occurred, there are certain steps that we need to take. We cannot tolerate or encourage such manifestations. Nor can we merely sweep all this under the carpet and go on as if nothing had happened.

In Matthew 12:33, Jesus instructs us: "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit." Wherever there is bad fruit, it comes from a bad tree. It is not enough to get rid of the bad fruit. We must also cut down the bad tree that produced it. If we fail to do this, the bad tree will go on producing more bad fruit. Undoubtedly the tree that produces animal behavior of this kind is some form of occult or pagan practice. For instance, there are frequent manifestations of animal behavior in some parts of Africa and India.

To cut down the tree requires that the leaders responsible identify the problem, confess it as sin and repent of it. Nowhere in the Bible is there any ground to suppose that God will forgive sins that we are not willing to confess. Somebody has said, "The confession must be as wide as the transgression." If leaders have tolerated these things in the presence of th

eir people, then in the presence of their people they need to confess it as a sin and cancel it. Otherwise, if the bad tree is not cut down, it will go on producing bad fruit.

In closing, I want to give a little "parable" of my own construction, which is about my relationship with my wife. In this par able my wife represents the Holy Spirit and I represent God. Now please understand, this is a very simple little parable a nd I am fully aware that the Holy Spirit is not the wife of God. But with those cautions, let me relate the parable.

A friend comes to me and says, "I saw you and your wife together on the platform the other evening and she looked so b eautiful, so fresh, so full of the Holy Spirit." So I say, "Thank you. That's really how she is." Then, a little later, the same man comes to me and says, "You know, yesterday I saw your wife in a bar with a man drinking." And I say, "That was no t my wife! My wife is a pure and godly woman. She does not go to bars and she does not drink with strangers. My wife w as right here with me all day yesterday. Don't speak that way about my wife!"

But a little later, he comes to me and says, "You know, I saw your wife yesterday sunbathing topless on the beach." The n I get really angry. I say to him, "My wife was nowhere near the beach yesterday, and she would never expose herself li ke that! If you want to remain my friend, you've got to come to the place where you don't identify that loose, immoral wo man as my wife, because that's an insult to her and to me, If you want to remain my friend, you've got to change the way you speak about my wife."

The application, of course, is this: if you want to remain a friend of God, you cannot afford to identify His Holy Spirit as s omething that is loose or immoral or ugly or unholy, because that angers God intensely.

Now we come to one final Scripture, which is in Matthew 12:31-32. Jesus says, "Therefore I say to you, every sin and bl asphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit it will not be forgiven him, eith er in this age or in the age to come."

That is a very solemn and frightening warning. We are warned by Jesus Himself to be very, very careful how we speak a bout the Holy Spirit, how we represent the Holy Spirit.

Jesus uses the word blasphemy, and I decided to look it up in my big Greek lexicon. The primary meaning of to blasphe me is given in the lexicon as this: to speak lightly or amiss of sacred things. So when you speak lightly or amiss concerni ng the Holy Spirit, or misrepresent the character of the Holy Spirit, by definition you are close to blaspheming.

If you have ever done that, or been prone to do it, or been associated with those who do it, I want to offer you some sinc ere advice: You need to repent. You need to settle that matter once and for all with God and never again be guilty of mis representing God's Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit is holy and He is God.