

Articles and Sermons :: Uproar in the Church -prince**Uproar in the Church -prince - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2007/1/29 18:24****Uproar in the Church***by Derek Prince*

Reports have been coming in from Christian groups in widely separated locations of what appears to be a strange new phenomenon. Believers of different ages and widely different social backgrounds are being overcome by prolonged outbreaks of laughter which have no obvious cause. Sometimes they may also act as if they are drunk.

Often this laughter appears to be contagious. Those who have experienced it apparently 'transmit' it to others. Large groups may be seized by it simultaneously.

Both ministers and lay people from a wide range of denominations have been affected in this way. Some testify that it has had a stimulating effect on their faith and has brought them closer to the Lord. On the other hand, there are those who are sceptical and view this kind of experience as a deception of the enemy.

As a result of all this, I am frequently being asked whether I believe that the Holy Spirit at times produces in people prolonged, exuberant and apparently causeless laughter. 'I have to believe it,' I reply, 'because that is how I was saved more than 50 years ago.'

In the summer of 1941, I was part of a medical unit of the British Army billeted in a hotel on the North Bay of Scarborough in Yorkshire. The hotel had been gutted of all its furniture and fittings. Our 'beds' were simply straw mattresses on the floor.

While in Scarborough I had some brief contacts with Pentecostal Christians, who confronted me for the first time with my need to receive Christ as my personal Saviour. At that point in my life I was a nominal Anglican, who never voluntarily attended church. I had never before heard of Pentecostals, and I had no idea what they believed or what kind of people they were.

About nine months previously, however, I had started to read the Bible through from beginning to end. I had no religious motive. I regarded the Bible merely as a work of philosophy. As a professional philosopher, I felt it was my academic duty to find out what the Bible had to say. At that point I had come as far as the book of Job - but it had been a dreary task!

Confronted in this was with the claims of Christ, however, I decided about 11 o'clock one night to pray 'until something happened'. I had no idea what I might expect to happen. For about an hour I struggled in vain to form some kind of coherent prayer. Then about midnight I became aware of a presence and I found myself saying to some unknown person what Jacob had said when wrestling with the angel at Peniel: 'Unless you bless me, I will not let you go' (Genesis 32:26).

I repeated these words several times with increasing emphasis: 'I will not let you go, I will not let you go ...' Then I began to say to the same unknown person, 'Make me love you more and more'. When I got to these last words, I began to repeat them: 'more and more and more ...'

At this point an invisible power came down over me and I found myself on my back on the floor, with my arms in the air, still saying, 'more and more and more ...'

After a while my words changed to deep sobbing which rose up from my belly through my lips, shaking my whole body convulsively. The sobs did not proceed out of anything in my conscious mind. I had no special sense of being sinful.

After about half an hour, without any act of my volition, the sobbing changed to laughter. I had no more conscious reason for laughing than I had had for sobbing. The laughter, like the sobbing, flowed from my belly. At first, it was quite gentle, but it gradually became louder and louder. I had the impression that I was being immersed in a sea of laughter that reverberated around the room.

At this point the soldier who shared the room with me woke up to find me on my back on the floor clothed only in my underwear, with my arms in the air, laughing uproariously. Rising from his mattress, he walked around me rather helplessly two or three times, keeping at a safe distance. Finally he said, 'I don't know what to do with you. I suppose it's no good pouring water over you.' An inaudible voice within me responded, 'Even water wouldn't put this out!'

However, I remembered dimly having heard years earlier in church that we should not blaspheme the Holy Spirit. Contrary to all my natural reasoning, I knew that what was in me was the Holy Spirit. In order not to offend my friend, I rolled over onto my face and laboriously crawled to my mattress. Pulling the blanket over my head, I eventually fell asleep, still laughing - quietly.

A totally different person

Next morning I awoke to an amazing, but objective fact: I was a totally different person. No longer did vile language flow out of my mouth. Prayer was no longer an effort, it was as natural as breathing. I could not even drink a glass of water without pausing to thank God for it.

At six o'clock, as was my usual custom, I went to the pub for a drink. But when I got to the door, my legs 'locked'. They would not carry me inside the pub. I stood there having an argument with my legs. Then, to my surprise, I realised I was no longer interested in what the pub had to offer. I turned round and walked back to my billet.

Back in my billet once again, I opened my Bible to continue reading. At this point, however, I discovered the most amazing change of all. Overnight the Bible had become a completely new book. It was as if there were only two persons in the universe - God and me. The Bible was God speaking directly and personally to me. This has never changed, and it is equally true of the Old Testament and the New.

I opened by chance at Psalm 126:1-2: 'When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter...'

At that point I paused. 'That's exactly what happened to me,' I thought. 'It wasn't I who was laughing. My mouth was being filled with laughter from some other source!' Upon further reflection, I saw that this strange, supernatural laughter was the way that God's people expressed their joy and excitement at being delivered from captivity. ...

One evening about ten days after my first encounter with the Lord, I was lying on my back on my mattress in the billet and I began to speak an unfamiliar language that sounded to me like Chinese. Once again, I dimly recalled something I had heard in church about 'speaking with other tongues'. I knew it was connected somehow with the day of Pentecost. At first I spoke timidly and hesitantly, but as I relaxed, the flow of words became free and forceful.

Once again, the initiative did not come from me. I was responding to a powerful inner force that came very specifically - like my previous laughter - from my belly.

The following evening I again found myself speaking an unknown language, but it was obviously different from the language I had been speaking the previous evening. This time I noticed that the words had a very marked poetic rhythm.

After a few moments of silence, I began to speak in English, but the words were not of my choosing, and their content was on a level far above that of my own understanding. Also, they seemed to have a rhythm similar to that of the words that I had previously spoken in an unknown language. I concluded that my words in English were an interpretative rendering of what I had previously said in the unknown language.

One brief section of what I said in English remains indelibly impressed upon my memory. In vivid imagery, it outlined God's plan for my life. Looking back over more than 50 years, I can see how God's plan has been - and is still being - progressively worked out in my life.

In retrospect, too, I have gained a new understanding of my initial experience of supernatural laughter. Unconventional as it was, it proved to be the divinely appointed door through which I entered a lifelong walk of faith. It also had the effect of liberating me from many preconceptions of my background and culture which could have been a barrier to my further spiritual progress.

In Matthew 12:33 Jesus states the most decisive test that must be applied to all forms of spiritual experience: 'a tree is k

known by its fruit.' I have to ask myself therefore: What has been the fruit of my strange experience? Is it possible to give an objective answer?

Yes, the fruit of that experience has been a life converted from sin to righteousness, from agnostic dabbling in the occult to unshakeable faith in Jesus Christ as he is revealed in the Scriptures - life that has been bringing forth fruit in God's Kingdom for well over 50 years. Certainly that was no transient product of autosuggestion or of some mere emotional extravagance.

From time to time, in the succeeding years, I have received a renewed experience of supernatural laughter. I have also seen other believers touched by God in a similar way, but this has never been a main emphasis of my teaching. Almost invariably I have found this kind of laughter has a double effect: it is both cleansing and exhilarating. At times it has been accompanied by miracles of physical healing or of deliverance from emotional conditions such as depression. ...

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The fruit we should look for

I have been emphasising the principle that 'a tree is known by its fruit.' Logically, therefore, in evaluating the current move in the church, we should ask: If this move is from God, what kind of fruit should we look for? In reply, I would suggest five main kinds of fruit that would authenticate the present move.

1. The fruit of repentance

All through the New Testament the first thing that God demanded was not faith, but repentance. John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus by calling for repentance (Matthew 3:2). When the religious people came to him for baptism, he demanded that they first produce in their lives the fruits of repentance (Matthew 3:7-8).

The first word that Jesus preached was, 'Repent' (Mark 1:15). He told the multitudes, 'Unless you repent, you will perish' (Luke 13:3-5). After his resurrection he told his disciples that repentance, first, and then forgiveness of sins should be preached to all nations (Luke 24:17).

On the day of Pentecost the first demand that Peter made of the convicted but unconverted multitude was 'Repent - then be baptised' (Acts 2:38).

Speaking to the people of Athens, Paul said, 'God now commands everyone everywhere to repent' (Acts 17:30). Throughout his ministry he required, first repentance toward God, then faith toward Christ (Acts 20:21).

True repentance is not an emotion, but a decision of the will - a decision to turn away from all sin and unrighteousness and to submit unreservedly to the Lordship of Jesus.

Repentance is the first of the six foundational doctrines listed in Hebrews 6:1-2. Those who have not truly repented can never have a solid foundation for their lives as Christians. Over the years I have counselled hundreds of Christians with various problems in their lives. As a result, I have concluded that at least 50 per cent of the problems in the lives of Christians are due to one simple fact: they have never truly repented.

I believe that a renewed emphasis on repentance is the most urgent need of the contemporary church in the West. To be effective, any move in the church must deal with this issue.

2. Respect for Scripture

A second decisive factor in our lives as Christians is our attitude to Scripture. Jesus called the Scripture 'the word of God' and he set his personal seal upon it by five simple words: 'the Scripture cannot be broken' (John 10:35). No amount of 'higher criticism' can set aside the plain meaning of these words. If we believe in Jesus then we believe in the Bible. If we do not believe in the Bible, then we do not believe in Jesus.

In Isaiah 66:2 the Lord says: 'This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word' (NIV). God here combines repentance - a humble and contrite spirit - with faith in his word.

Why should we tremble at God's word? First, because it is the way that God the Father and God the Son come to us and make their home with us (John 14:23). Second, because God's word will one day be our judge (John 12:48).

From creation onwards, God has worked through two main agents: his word and his Spirit. First, the Spirit of God moved; then God's word went forth (Genesis 1:2-3). The result was creation.

Ever since then the Spirit and the word have always worked together in harmony. Anything that the Spirit does harmonises with what the word says. Furthermore, all Scripture is inspired by his Holy Spirit and he never contradicts himself (2 Timothy 3:16).

This means that every kind of spiritual manifestation must be tested by this standard: Is it in harmony with Scripture? If so, we can receive it. If not, we must reject it.

3 Exaltation of Jesus

In John 16:13-14 Jesus promised his disciples, 'When he, the Spirit of truth has come, he will guide you into all truth... He will glorify me...'

Jesus here reveals two important facts about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. First of all, his supreme function is to glorify Jesus. This provides an authoritative test of any spiritual manifestation. Does it focus our attention on Jesus? Does it exalt Jesus?

As soon as human personalities are allowed to take the centre of the stage, the Holy Spirit begins to withdraw. The exaltation of human personalities has many times quenched what was originally a genuine move of the Holy Spirit.

Then we need to notice that Jesus is careful to emphasise that the Holy Spirit is not an 'it' but a 'He'. When people begin to explain spiritual experience in terms of getting 'it', it can easily happen that they get the wrong 'it'.

Jesus is a person and the Holy Spirit is a person. The Holy Spirit, as a person, draws believers together around the person of Jesus. When we make a doctrine or an experience the focus of our gathering, we are spiritually 'off centre'.

4. Love for our fellow Christians

In John 13:35 Jesus told his followers, 'By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.' In 1 Timothy 1:5 Paul said, 'The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith' (NASB). Any form of religious activity that does not produce this result, he dismissed as 'fruitless discussion'.

In 1 Corinthians 13:2 Paul applied this test to himself: If I have all the spiritual gifts of power and revelation, but have not love, I am nothing.

Before we apply this test to others, we need to do the same as Paul and apply it to ourselves. We each need to ask: Has my faith made me a loving person?

Then - and only then - can we apply this test to the present move in the church. Is it producing Christians who sincerely love one another - regardless of denominational labels? Will it cause the unbelievers to say of these people what the world said of the early church: 'See how these Christians love one another?'

5. Loving concern for the unreached

In John 4:35 Jesus told his disciples, 'Lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are white already for harvest.' If the

se words were true even in the time of Jesus, they are certainly more true today. I have been privileged to travel and minister in many nations and I have formed one firm conclusion: We are living in the harvest hour!

Yet, alas, many Christians, who could be working in the harvest fields of the world, are caught in a snare of materialistic self-centredness. I believe that any genuine move of the Holy Spirit will result in multitudes of new labourers being thrust forth into the world's harvest fields. Otherwise it does not truly reflect the heart of God.

If a significant number of Christians in the current move successfully pass all, or most, of the five tests outlined above, then it is safe to conclude that this is, essentially, a move of God. This does not mean that everyone or everything in it is faultless. God has no faultless people to work with.

It is amazing what he can do with weak and fallible people who are truly surrendered to Him.