

General Topics :: Kudos to J. Lee Grady for this article!

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Whatever happened to the Fear of God?

If we want the same level of supernatural anointing that was evident in the New Testament church, we should also pray for a higher level of holiness.

We charismatics yearn for a return to the raw intensity of the early church—the angelic visitations, power encounters, prophecies, mass conversions and missionary adventures. I want all of that! The book of Acts is the gold standard for normative Christianity, and we shouldn't rest until we see it manifested in our generation.

But those first-century miracles didn't happen in a vacuum. They flowed from a praying church that was bathed in humility and holiness. The early disciples had not only been baptized in the Holy Spirit; they had also been baptized with fire (see Matt. 3:11). And the fire of God is a cleansing flame that burns up sin and produces the fear of the Lord.

We tend to forget that the same people who experienced tongues on the day of Pentecost, and then witnessed the healing of a lame beggar in Jerusalem, also watched in horror as Ananias and Sapphira—two influential but compromising church members—dropped dead because God's presence was so strong. When their bodies were carried away, the Bible says, "great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things" (Acts 5:11, NASB).

Do we want that level of God's presence? The fear that came on the early church is also called a "sense of awe" in Acts 2:43. We often downplay the fear of God by saying that it really means "reverence." But the Greek word used in Acts 5:11 and Acts 2:43 is phobos, which can be translated "exceeding dread, alarm or terror."

We love the ecstatic joy and the goose bumps that accompany revival meetings. But revival is not fun and games. Are we ready for the terror?

As I pray for revival in my own life and in my nation, I have started praying regularly for the fear of the Lord. And I think it will manifest in some key areas:

1. Truthfulness. When we walk in close fellowship with the Holy Spirit we will feel an immediate sense of conviction if we say anything false or misleading. That conviction will hound us until we repent and repair the damage we have done with our mouths. We will hear the word of the Lord echoing in our conscience: "Do not lie to one another" (Col. 3:9).

I realized a few years ago that I sometimes lied when someone asked me if I had read a certain book or knew of a certain celebrity or sports figure. Even if I did not know anything about the subject of the conversation, I would nod and pretend that I was informed. I recognized later that I did this out of insecurity, hoping to appear knowledgeable. I had to repent of pride and ask God to help me be honest.

This may seem minor, but little white lies breed serious deceit. If we have no fear of God, we will exaggerate and think nothing of it. This can become a crisis when church leaders, in their zeal for revival, are careless when reporting miracles, healings or numbers of conversions. Exaggeration is lying. If we build a ministry by stretching the truth, we stand on shaky ground. Christ's kingdom cannot be built on hype.

We often assume that the sin of Ananias and Sapphira was greed. But the Bible actually says they were struck dead because they lied to the Holy Spirit (see Acts 5:3). They sold a piece of property and pretended to give all the money to the apostles when in fact they had kept some of the proceeds for themselves. They were trying to look good in the eyes of church leaders. They were attempting to buy favor and influence—and God caught them in the act.

2. Sexual purity. All of us know that the American church is facing a sexual crisis. Some denominations, such as the Episcopal Church, have bowed to the spirit of Baal to embrace homosexual practice as acceptable behavior. Recently, Episcopal bishop Gene Robinson announced that gay marriage is a new truth revealed by the Holy Spirit.

Thankfully the charismatic world hasn't slipped to that level of depravity. But we have never witnessed so much moral f

failure in our ranks. Many ministers are living double lives and hiding their girlfriends and out-of-wedlock babies. In my city, one prominent minister had an affair with a stripper and went right on preaching from the same pulpit without skipping a beat.

If I am walking in the fear of God, I will not peek at pornography, entertain fantasy or cross a sexual boundary. And if I am in church leadership, I will never allow ministers with questionable sexual reputations to defile the congregation by allowing him to lay hands on them or impart his defilement. I don't care how "anointed" a man of God is or how accurate his prophecies are. If he has been engaging in immorality and has not been restored properly, he will infect people with his sin if we give him a platform.

3. Financial integrity. We should learn from the example of Eli's reprobate sons, Hophni and Phinehas, that God does not wink at extortion—especially when it involves money that has been given to God. These "worthless" men were judged severely because they had their hands in the offering plate (see 1 Sam. 2:12-17).

The eighth commandment forbids stealing. Yet in the "Spirit-filled" church today, ministers think nothing of robbing the saints. Too often the collection of the offering turns into a circus involving manipulation, theatrics and the twisting of Scripture—as well as arms—to meet a budget goal. Why should we be surprised when God's presence lifts at that point in the service?

If we truly fear the Lord we will be conscious of the fact that He watches how we handle money in His house. He sees every dollar that is given. Heaven keeps accurate accounting. God knows how we word our financial appeals and if we use the money for one thing when it was pledged for another.

4. Reverence for God. In some charismatic churches today, leaders have introduced a trendy new teaching that compares God to drugs. They proclaim that "Jesus is my D.O.C."—my "Drug of Choice." In a bizarre attempt to be relevant with our culture, they compare a spiritual encounter with God to a heroin overdose. In one instance, a group of people pretended to shoot invisible needles into their arms as they prayed for one another and asked God for His anointing. And this was in a so-called "revival service"!

One minister in Oregon refers to God as "Jehovahjuana"—implying that the Lord can give you a marijuana high. Another conference speaker in California put a plastic Jesus from a nativity scene into his mouth and encouraged a group of teens to "smoke baby Jesus." The kids all laughed and everyone thought this was a hoot.

Actually, mishandling the name of the Lord in such a flippant manner, and comparing God to an illegal drug, is what the Bible calls blasphemy. We do not have permission to dishonor His character by changing His name to something sinful and degrading.

How desperately we need the dreadful fire of His holy presence! I hope we will all cry out together the prayer of David in Psalm 86:11: "Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name."