

# Foundational Teachings



## The Thorny Issue of Divorce and Remarriage

—by Charles P. Schmitt, D. Min., D.D.

Few issues are as difficult for the Church to negotiate as the issue of divorce. And the issue becomes even more complicated when it becomes an issue of divorce *and remarriage*.

On the one hand, the Church must seek to be a redemptive, restorative community; on the other hand, the Church must also seek to be obedient and accountable to the inspired Scriptures, God's Holy Word. How to do both at the same time regarding the divorce issue can be a challenge!

### What the Scriptures Teach

Our initial consideration is that, scripturally, divorce is *clearly against the will of God*. In Malachi 2:16, the Lord pointedly declares, "I hate divorce..." Concerning divorce, Jesus taught us that "*from the beginning it has not been this way*" (Matthew 18:8b). God's will is for a man to leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. God made no provision for divorce in His creation of man and woman. Also, according to Romans 7:2-3, the death of a first mate is the only legitimate way, according to the law

of God, that a marriage bond can be dissolved. Jesus further teaches us that those who divorce their mates and marry another, except for the cause of immorality, are guilty of adultery (Matthew 19:9). The Scripture, then, is clear—*divorce is contrary to the will of God*. These clear scriptural stands affect how we handle matters when saints in Immanuel's announce that they are going to divorce one another.

### Healing Past Tragedies

But first of all, let us explore how the Church can handle divorce (and remarriage), which happened in people's lives before they were saved and became a part of the Body of Christ. Because something is contrary to the Word of God does not mean that it cannot happen. Murder is against the Word of God, but murder does happen, and just because murder is contrary to the Word of God does not mean that the murdered person is not dead. Furthermore, even murder can be forgiven, though it cannot be rectified. And so it is with divorce. Because divorce is

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## Talk with Your Children

—by Dotty E. Schmitt

The Promise of the Holy Spirit is "*for you and your children*" (Acts 2:39).

Talk with them about

entering into this promise. Many children four and five years old have been filled with the Spirit, speaking in other tongues!

Peter said, "By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through Him that has given this complete healing to him..." (Acts 3:16). Talk with your children and youth about God using them in ministry

to the sick and disabled. Many young children and young people have been used by the Lord in healing and miracles because of their childlike faith!

Both Peter himself and the whole Church together experienced a mighty *refilling* with the Holy Spirit. Talk with your children and youth about "being *constantly filled* with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18, literally). Filled and refilled!

The Scriptures speak about *not grieving the Holy Spirit* by sinning (Ephesians 4:30-32) and *not putting out the Spirit's*

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## Talk with Your Children

fire by lack of passion for the things of God (1 Thessalonians 4:19-20). Talk with your children and youth about the ungrieved presence of the Spirit, about not quenching the Spirit's fire!

In school our children and youth are often pressured by peers and teachers to "cool it," to "tone down," to not be so outspoken about God. Encourage them by Peter's boldness in Acts 4:12, 20 to be an uncompromising witness for Jesus!

Acts 4:32-35 and Acts 2:44-45 speak about the care members of the Body of Christ have for needy and

less fortunate people in giving to them. Talk with your own children and youth about how they too can be generous towards those both here and abroad who have less, and even nothing, at times!

Acts 2:42, Acts 3:1, and Acts 4:31 emphasize the prayer life of the early believers. Talk with your children and youth about the importance of *their own prayer lives*—praying "in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests ... prayer for all the saints" (Ephesians 6:18). †

—Written in collaboration with her husband,  
Charles P. Schmitt

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## The Thorny Issue of Divorce and Remarriage

wrong does not mean it cannot happen, and when it does happen, that does not mean it cannot be forgiven, though it may not always be able to be rectified. The word divorce in Hebrew means "a cutting off" (*kerithuth*); in the Greek it means "to loose or release from a bond" (*apoluo*). A divorced person is one who is released and severed from the bond to the first mate. For this reason, Jesus pled the point, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder," clearly indicating that marriages can be put asunder. The marriage bond can be severed, as painful as this is to the heart of God. But a divorced and then remarried person does not continue to have a former mate. The original marriage bond has been dissolved, and they have only one mate, their current one. But what about the sin involved in divorce, particularly when one has been the *initiator* of the divorce without the grounds spoken of by Jesus in Matthew 19:9 ("the cause of immorality")?

All sin, including divorce, can be forgiven on the foundation of godly repentance and true faith. "The blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7, 9). And by His power and grace, Jesus brings us all forth as a new creation in which all the old has passed away, and *everything* becomes new. Men and women can, consequently, be released from judgment in this issue because of God's mercy.

### But What about Current Situations?

Current situations, happening in the Body of Christ right now, must be handled redemptively, but must also be handled in obedience and with accountability to God's Holy Word.

First of all, we take note that different factors may come into play in different situations. What do we do when one party in a marriage is a believer and the other is not? What do we do when one party in a marriage is guilty of unrepented, ongoing adultery and the other is not? What do we do when one party wants a divorce and the other does not? And what do we do when one party abandons the other? Paul apparently wrestled with these same considerations, prompting him to set down some guidelines. Paul writes—"To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must *remain unmarried* or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife" (1 Corinthians 7:10-11).

From these Scriptures we learn that the Lord's command is for a wife not to separate from her husband. But if she does separate from him because of physical abuse or verbal abuse, for example, she is to remain *unmarried* or else be *reconciled* to her husband. And I be-

lieve the Church is to help in that redemptive process of reconciliation! Paul concludes his remarks with the statement "and a husband must not divorce his wife." Divorce is not an acceptable option in God's economy. Jesus Himself gave only one exception for divorce—"except for *marital unfaithfulness*" (Matthew 5:32), and I would hasten to add that even in that kind of situation, we should seek, wherever possible, to encourage repentance and forgiveness and restoration rather than divorce.

What if one's marriage partner is an unbeliever? Paul states, "If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, *he must not divorce her*. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, *she must not divorce him*. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy" (1 Corinthians 7:12-14). Amazing promises!

And what about abandonment? Paul writes: "If the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound (to hold that marriage together) in such circumstances, God has called us to live in peace" (1 Corinthians 7:15).

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## The Thorny Issue of Divorce and Remarriage

And the bottom line for believers is clear—as far as their actions go—“Each one should *remain* in the situation, which he was in when God called him ... each man, *as responsible to God*, should *remain* in the situation God called him to” (1 Corinthians 7:20, 24). Paul’s bottom line is this: “Are you married? **DO NOT SEEK A DIVORCE**” (1 Corinthians 7:27).

### A Hard Heart: The Root Problem

In seeking to walk through the complicated labyrinth of issues that arise in a divorce situation, one factor must be watched for and avoided at all cost—hardness of heart. In giving the basic reason for divorce, Jesus

cited *hardness of heart* as the issue. “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives *because your hearts were hard*. But it was not this way from the beginning” (Matthew 19:8). As problems in marriages arise, we want to respond in the most redemptive fashion, seeking, at all costs, to save these marriages. Repentance, forgiveness, counseling, reconciliation are all godly qualities. Bitterness and unforgiveness, stubbornness and hardness of heart are, however, sinful qualities, and ones that may eventually necessitate a person being disciplined according to Matthew 18:15-17 for such hardness of heart.

A hundred different scenarios probably exist in any potential divorce situation. As leadership all we can do is plead, let us *walk*

together with you in this! In humbleness of heart, let us *work together* to find—if possible—the most redemptive conclusion possible. Not all marriages may be salvageable, because of the “hardness of heart” factor. But we certainly wish to stem the encroaching tide of the present 50% divorce rate that exists in the world around us! We want to please our Lord that His favor will be upon us. We want to honor and uphold His Word, and in *every* area of our lives—no less in this one—we want to be examples of God’s miracle-working power and grace! Amen! †

## A “Relevant” Message

—by Charles P. Schmitt

In Immanuel’s Strategic Plan we find these words: “We commit ourselves in our teaching to be orthodox and evangelical, wholly scriptural, well-balanced, spiritual and *relevant*.”

Rel•e•vant = from the Latin, to lift up. Meaning—uplifting, pertinent, to the point, appropriate, fit, applicable.

The question on the table today is what does it mean to be *relevant*? Certainly practical teachings on our walk with God, on marriage and family, on finances and health are relevant. In some churches and to some preachers, however, “relevance” unfortunately does not include being “wholly scriptural.” A verse may be thrown out as a springboard, but the message is basically pop-psychology, all for the purpose of leaving the constituents “feeling good.” Now, it’s good to feel good, but sometimes it’s even better to feel bad, especially when “feeling bad” becomes the birth pangs of *repentance*!

The fruit of this “relevant,” feel-good message has been disastrous. For a nation such as the United States, with such a high percentage of Spirit-filled evangelicals (25% Spirit-filled; 33% Evangelical) to be on such a seemingly irreversible secular, humanistic, downward spiral should tell us that something is wrong! The weakness may well be in our new brand of “relevant” evangelical Christianity. The “seeker-sensitive” move-

ment in modern-day evangelicalism is one of the chief proponents of the “relevant” message. But this movement was recently weighed in the balances and found gravely lacking. By their own internal evaluations, they themselves concluded that *their lack of biblical content has birthed a generation of anemic and ineffective Christians!*

We are divinely obligated to commit ourselves afresh and anew to the *relevance of inspired Scripture!* Scripture in and of itself, even apart from any human comments about it, is the most dynamically relevant book ever written! Paul tells his spiritual son, Timothy, “the Holy Scriptures ... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed (inspired) and is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that

the man of God may be *thoroughly (perfectly)* equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:15-16). The author of Hebrews also writes: “The Word (logos) of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit ... it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). And Jeremiah the prophet testifies, “When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight...” (Jeremiah 15:16).

Our daily personal study of Holy Scripture, our weekly corporate Bible studies, our Sunday morning expositions of God’s Holy Word become the most *relevant* messages we can ever embrace! The Word of God in and of itself is “uplifting, pertinent, to the point, appropriate, fit, applicable.” The Scriptures are God’s relevant message to us! Let us passionately give ourselves to them! Amen! †

*We are divinely  
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# Should We Pray the Lord's Prayer?

—by Charles P. Schmitt

I was recently loaned a book on prayer written by a contemporary, well-known minister. As I thumbed through the book I was positively impressed with many of the author's thoughts on answered prayer. One thought, however, was jarring to me—the author's insistence that we should not use the Lord's Prayer as a prayer model. He writes, "I believe this prayer could not possibly work for us today, and that God the Father could not possibly honor this prayer..." His first reason was "that Jesus just ended the prayer with *Amen* rather than with the phrase *in the name of Jesus*. And for that reason the Lord's Prayer won't work."

The author's second objection to the Lord's Prayer was the phrase, "Your kingdom come." Because the New Testament declares that we presently are the kingdom of God, we cannot be praying "Your kingdom come," as if it were yet future. The author's *third* objection to the Lord's Prayer was Jesus' statement: "deliver us from the evil one," because in Christ we "have been delivered from the evil one." Consequently, the author's conclusion was that the Lord's Prayer "is not a prayer for us today. Jesus gave the disciples this prayer to finish out the Old Covenant."

## My Response

First of all, Jesus introduced the Lord's Prayer with these words: "This, then, is how you should pray..." (Matthew 6:9). So, it appears as if this prayer was intended by Jesus to be a *template*—a pattern, a model—for our praying. (To me that doesn't mean that additional understandings could not be added, such as "in the name of Jesus").

Secondly, I personally make a very poor "dispensationalist" (believing God did something one way in one dispensation, and another entirely different way in another dispensation). I rather see a *continuity* in all that God has done in the past and all that He is presently doing now. I want to be more like "the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures *as well as old*" (Matthew 13:52). So I personally see value in the Lord's Prayer for us today, as I do in David's penitential prayer in Psalm 51, and as I do in Isaiah's prayer for revival recorded in Isaiah 64:1-4—but all in Jesus' name! Also, I

bless our congregation quite frequently in the words of the Aaronic blessing from Numbers 6:22-27—"The Lord bless you and keep you..." And I invariably add the words: "And this I ask *in Jesus' wonderful name. Amen.*"

Paul, in writing to Timothy, is quite emphatic that "all Scripture—including the Old Testament (with David's prayer and Isaiah's prayer) and the Gospels (with the Lord's Prayer)—is God-breathed (inspired) and is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be *thoroughly (perfectly) equipped for every good work*" (2 Timothy 3:16).

How then can we understand, "thy kingdom come" if God's kingdom has already come? Well—both thoughts are true! While it is true that we *presently are* the kingdom of God on the earth, it is also true that we yet await a *manifestation of that kingdom* on the earth as it is presently being manifest in heaven. When I see a world filled with war and hate, I must conclude that "the best is yet to come." So, though I believe the Church presently is the kingdom of God upon the earth, I also look forward to that prophesied day when the kingdoms of this world *shall become* the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ! And so, in that light, I can pray "Thy kingdom come."

And what about "deliver us from the evil one"? While it is true that "He *has rescued* (delivered) us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves..." (Colossians 1:13), it is also true that God must *daily work in us* that deliverance from the evil one. Thus, Paul prayed for the Thessalonians: "The Lord is faithful, and *He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one*" (2 Thessalonians 3:3). That's what I am believing for when I pray: "Deliver us from the evil one!" Amen!

So, should we pray the Lord's Prayer? Jesus said we should! Should we pray in His name? Jesus said we should (see His wonderful statements in John 14:13-14)! Should we pray to be delivered from evil? Of course! Should we daily pray for His kingdom—of which we are *presently* a part—to be yet visibly expressed in all the earth, in every nation, in every human heart? Yes! Yes! Yes! And Amen! †

# The Body of Christ

—by Charles P. Schmitt

The Body of Christ is called to be a redemptive, restorative, healing community. The Holy Scriptures instruct us (from *The Message*):

- "If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you, abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God" (Matthew 5:23-24).
- "If a fellow believer hurts you, go and tell him—work it out between the two of you. If he listens, you have made a friend. If he won't listen, take one or two others along so that the presence of witnesses will keep things honest, and try again. If he still won't listen, tell the church. If he won't listen to the church, you'll have to start over from scratch, confront him with the need for repentance, and offer again God's forgiving love" (Matthew 18:15-17).
- "If someone falls into sin, forgivingly restore him, saving your critical comments for yourself. You might be needing forgiveness before the day's out. Stoop down and reach out to those who are oppressed. Share their burdens, and so complete Christ's law" (Galatians 5:1-2).

The spirit of the New Testament in dealing with issues of offense and failure and sin is reflected in these words of Paul to the Galatians: "If someone is caught in a sin (in any trespass, NASB), you who are spiritual should restore him (literally, mend him, restore him to good condition, attune him) gently, meekly. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (6:1-4). From these words, we see that our actions are to be redemptive and restorative

*The spirit of the New Covenant, however, declares that "love covers over a multitude of sins"*

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# Dare to Be a Daniel— In Our Present Political “Lion’s Den”

—by Charles P. Schmitt

I’m amazed at the bold candor of Daniel when he was summoned before Nebuchadnezzar, the great emperor of the mighty Babylonian Empire. Called upon because the king’s advisors had failed in providing the needed answers in an hour of crisis, Daniel courteously, but candidly, spoke to Nebuchadnezzar’s need—“O King, be pleased to accept my advice: *Renounce your sins* by doing what is right, *and your wickedness* by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then, your prosperity will continue” (Daniel 4:27). Now that’s bold!

When I look at the political landscape, I sense there is a need for “Daniels” to boldly arise. Evangelicals seem, at times, to be floundering, as far as sounding a clear message to our country on behalf of God’s will. There is a need for “Daniels” to rise up and shake up the scene as God’s prophetic voice to a nation that is falling far short of the glory of God!

We must mourn the loss of the thousands of precious young men and women killed and maimed in the war in Iraq. And we must also mourn the loss of the tens of thousands of precious young boys and girls killed in the ill-fated abortion war against them, in what has been erroneously called “choice.”

Parents do have a choice, but not to destroy their own children! Any society that does that will not prosper. Our politicians dismiss the preborn as “fetuses,” not recognizing that this very word itself—according to Webster’s—condemns the demise of the preborn as murder. Fetuses are “our progeny—

our family ... our children ... our descendants, our offspring,” according to Webster’s. And that means a holy responsibility is ours as a society to protect them!

And what shall we say about the grand-scale attack against the sanctity of marriage? What Holy Scripture clearly and boldly condemns, many of our politicians now promote and applaud. The planks of much of our political systems are rotten and need to be replaced with soundness! Isaiah was clear in his message—“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness...” (Isaiah 5:20).

I wish to challenge you to dare to be a Daniel. At political meetings *speak up*, as unpopular as that may be! At the polling booth seek to *vote the Kingdom of God!* As occasion presents itself *cry out, demonstrate, pray, and support* those who stand for the righteousness of God! On the issue of prayer, 2 Chronicles 7:14 is as relevant today as it was when it was first uttered!

In every way possible, on every occasion possible, let us *dare to be a Daniel*. Our nation, our politicians, our elected officials need to hear God’s mandate—“Renounce your sins by *doing what is right*, and your wickedness by *being kind to the oppressed*. It may be that then your prosperity will continue!” And in an hour of apparent national economic recession, we need to take God’s concerns seriously—for “it may be that then (our) prosperity will continue!” Amen! †

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## The Body of Christ

in nature and are to be exercised with gentleness and meekness of spirit. This is what Paul calls “the law of Christ.”

The spirit of New Testament dealings is exemplified in how Jesus dealt with the woman taken in adultery (John 8:1-11). The Pharisees “made her stand before the group” (John 8:3); they were into public accusation. The spirit of the New Covenant, however, declares that “love covers over a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8, NIV). Love covers over a multitude of sins with the blood of Jesus (which satisfies the justice and righteousness of God and extends the redeeming mercy and transforming grace of God to those in need). The Pharisees

were also into an unholy harshness: “In the law Moses commanded us to stone such women” (John 8:5). Jesus, on the contrary, freely loved the woman, forgave her, protected her, released her and empowered her by His grace to walk in holiness: “Neither do I condemn you ... Go now and leave (a Greek imperative) your life of sin” (John 8:11). This way of dealing with offense and sin is called “the law of Christ” by Paul in Galatians 6:2. And this becomes for us the spirit in which New Testament Church dealings are to be carried out.

God desires His people to be a redemptive, restorative, healing community. Amen! †

# Three Days and Three Nights

—by Charles P. Schmitt

I recently read an interesting article entitled, “The Resurrection Was Not on Sunday.” The article, by a Sabbatarian group, was an explanation of Jesus’ words in Matthew 12:40—“As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” Their conclusion was that Jesus was crucified on a Wednesday (rather than on Good Friday) and was raised on a Saturday rather than Resurrection Sunday. A Saturday resurrection, of course (Saturday being the Sabbath), was exactly what they were after. What disturbed me most in the article was not their explanation of the “three days and three nights,” or even their Sabbath-keeping, but their sectarian conclusions that they alone were right and everyone else was wrong!—“You have a choice: You can believe the common tradition, the minister down the street and most of your neighbors—or you can believe ... the historical record found in your Bible ...” (their words). I think we have yet another choice.

I personally have long believed that a Friday crucifixion was probably not accurate. I’d probably opt for a Thursday crucifixion allowing for Jesus being three days and three nights in the tomb. Thursday day (a partial day is considered as a day in Scripture) and Thursday night; Friday day and Friday night; Saturday day and Saturday night, with the resurrection occurring sometime between the start of the First Day of the Week, which began Saturday at sundown, and the morning of the First Day, our Sunday morning, when His followers came to the empty tomb only to find Him already risen. So why then don’t we rearrange our services accordingly and have a Maundy Wednesday service and a Good Thursday service and a Saturday night Resurrection service? For one good reason.

The problem of sectarian elitism is not new to our times. Even in the Early Church the issue of “right” days and “wrong” days was a divisive issue. Paul writes to the Romans, “One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. *Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind*. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord” (Romans 14:5-6).

Then Paul makes a very interesting follow-up statement—“For this very reason, *Christ*

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# Why Moves of God Are Often “Messy”

—by Charles P. Schmitt

The movings of God’s Holy Spirit have become the Church’s most serious quest in this generation! God’s *revival presence* is our most precious pursuit. This is “the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Your face, O God of Jacob” (Psalm 24:6). When the Lord, whom we seek, suddenly comes to the His temple, amazing things happen. The Church is revived; sinners are converted; backsliders are restored; the sick and the infirm are healed; the work of the devil is driven back; society is changed; and, above all else, our Lord Jesus Christ is honored and held high!

This past century has been a phenomenal revival century; and the fruits of God’s revival presence in the 20th century abound. When I was converted in the early 1950s, the earth’s population was just over three billion people, and three percent of that three billion professed to be the Lord’s (some ninety million people). Today, fifty years later, because of the moves of the Holy Spirit, in a world of over six billion people, seventeen percent (some one billion people) now profess to be the Lord’s (with another billion nominally so)! The amazing fruit of God’s moving!

I consider it a privilege to have been touched by every major move of the Holy Spirit in the past half century. My wife, Dotty, and I were converted in a time of revival in the early 1950s. Our Dutch Reformed youth group and our high school experienced a season of refreshing from the presence of the Lord at that same time. We also experienced outpourings of the Holy Spirit in Minnesota during the Charismatic move and the Jesus People move in the 60s

and 70s. Our experiences were riveting! We then experienced an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in 1994 here in Immanuel’s Church, and we were further impacted in the years following by both the Toronto Revival and the Brownsville Revival. And now there is a present fresh “sound of abundance of rain” and we are reaching out again in great expectation toward the Lord! “While on others You are calling, *do not pass us by!*”

Someone recently commented, “Revivals are always ‘messy’”—and they are. Having walked through a number of moves of God, I have yet to see a revival that wasn’t messy. And that issue is the burden of this present writing. Why are revivals inevitably messy? And what can we do to preserve the precious parts of God’s move?

First of all, let us be perfectly clear on this—every move of the Holy Spirit is *pure*. What comes down from God out of heaven is *always pure*. “Every good and *perfect gift* is from above, coming down from the Father...” (James 1:17). “The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure...” (James 3:17). What the Father sends is always *good* and *perfect* and *pure!*

When the one hundred and twenty were filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, that was a pure work. It was a good work; it was a perfect work. It was not totally conventional, however. The sound of “a violent wind,” the tongues of fire, the speaking in other languages caused “bewilderment”; onlookers were “utterly amazed.” Some were “perplexed.” Others mocked. They “made fun ... and said, ‘They have had too much wine’” (Acts 2:1-13). From their overwhelming joy and their lack of inhibition, and probably even their staggering, the saints appeared drunk. The first thing Peter had to explain was that “these men are not *drunk*, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel...” (Acts 2:15-16). What God does is always pure, though it often is unconventional!

And then there is the human element. As that enters into the mix, the mix can become messy—not because of God, but because of man.

Behaviors and mannerisms, words and actions that are not always edifying to the saints, and which can be distracting to seekers, are the plight of every move of God. Someone has said it would be better, however, to have some “wildfire” than “no fire,” and I guess if one were pressed to choose between the two, any fire is better than no

fire—but I would still opt for the “*holy fire*”—*God-kindled fire!*

We need to ask at this juncture, exactly what is the root of some of this distracting behavior? Why do some behave and carry on in ways that do not always edify? The problem is addressed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14. It is interesting to me to note in this passage that Paul never upbraids the Corinthians for “false manifestations,” nor does he ever imply that what they are doing is “of the devil” or even “in the flesh.” He begins on the basis that these are spiritual manifestations, but ones that need guidelines.

From the Corinthian situation we learn two valuable principles. First, that the manifest presence of God does not automatically authenticate all that may be going on in a meeting. Second, if manifestations of the Spirit’s presence were *uncontrollable*, then Paul’s guidelines for people to *control themselves and their manifestations* would make no sense. The specific Corinthian problem was

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## Three Days and Three Nights

*died and returned to life* so that He might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? Therefore, let us stop passing judgment on one another...” (Romans 14:9-10, 13).

These statements probably uncover the arguments going on in the Early Church over which days were the “right” days for remembering when “Christ died and returned to life”! But Paul did not support the “right” days controversy. Paul’s encouragement was rather to have a *right spirit!* A generous spirit! A non-divisive spirit, a non-sectarian spirit! And whether it is regarding the Sabbath (and on this, “do not let anyone judge you,” Colossians 2:16-17), or regarding the right day for Christmas, or regarding which day was the crucifixion, or when was the resurrection—on all these issues that people like to wrangle over—let the generous grace of God always be found in our hearts! “Let us, therefore, *make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification*” (Romans 14:19)! In this light, let us celebrate our Lord—who was born for us, who died for us, and who was raised for us! Amen! †

*The sound of “a violent wind,” the tongues of fire, the speaking in other languages caused “bewilderment”*

## Why Moves of God Are Often “Messy”

this—“if the whole church comes together and *everyone speaks in tongues*, and some who do not understand (‘some inquirers,’ NIV margin) or some unbelievers come in, will they not say you are out of your mind?” Paul then sets down some guidelines—“If anyone speaks in a tongue, *two—or at most three—* should speak, one *at a time*, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should *keep quiet...*” (1 Corinthians 14:23, 27-28).

Paul was concerned about the seeking inquirer and about the lost unbeliever! And we should be too! I’m sure some were not happy with Paul’s adjustments. I’m sure some accused him of quenching the Spirit and taking away their liberty. I remember the statement being made at Toronto and Brownsville, “We’ll probably let things go that should have been stopped, and we’ll probably stop things we should have let go. Please forgive us.” Leadership is not always perfect in its judgment calls, but an imperfect leadership is better than no leadership at all. The goal of all godly leadership is to keep the move of God as free from human oddity as possible.

But what are the roots of some of these peculiar happenings? A “spirituality” that is out of balance can be one of the roots. Some of the Corinthians had this “off-center” spirituality. (We used to call it “super-spirituality” in times past.) The Corinthians thought they “knew something,” but they really didn’t yet know as they should (1 Corinthians 8:13). I pick up Paul’s impatience with the super-spirituality of some of the Corinthians in his words of rebuke in 1 Corinthians 14:36-38. “If you won’t play by the rules, God can’t use you. Sorry” (1 Corinthians 14:38, *The Message*). Unfortunately, usually “super-spiritual” folks are not correctable. They don’t want to play by the rules. They just up and leave.

Spiritual *immaturity* can be another root of the problem. It was one of the problems the Corinthians had—“To be perfectly frank, I’m getting exasperated with your infantile thinking. How long before you grow up and use your head—your *adult* head?” (1 Corinthians 14:20, *The Message*) I find myself at times concerned when I am with some saints, and note how their jerks and their outbursts are identical to those in a certain stream in the move of God. I sense their behavior is a “learned behavior”; they’re actually subconsciously “imitating” what they’ve seen and heard elsewhere, and you can usually tell exactly where. They carry that brand, but, for them it’s not “original.”

When it came to the holy anointing oil and the holy incense in Exodus 30, both were forbidden by God to be *imitated* (Exodus 30:32-33, 37-38). God wants to do *original* things in and through each one of us; “imitation” is usually a sign of immaturity. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “As long as you grab for what makes you feel good or makes you look important, are you really much different than a babe at the breast, content only when everything’s going your way? (1 Corinthians 3:1-3, *The Message*).

Then there is that false understanding of “freedom.” The Corinthians were enmeshed in that also. They were “free”—free to do as they felt, regardless of who they turned off. They really didn’t care about others, only that they could be “free” to exercise their freedom. Paul’s whole argument on this issue of freedom in 1 Corinthians, chapters eight through ten, is that we are free—but free to serve others, and that those who are really “free” are *free to lay their freedom down for the sake of others!* Paul testified: “Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to *win as many as possible*” (9:19). And he admonished the Corinthians: “Do not cause anyone to *stumble*, whether Jews, Greeks or the Church of God—even as I try to please everybody in every way ... so that they may be *saved*” (10:32-33). Verse 10:33 in *The Message* reads: “...don’t be callous in your exercise of freedom, thoughtlessly stepping on the toes of those who aren’t as free as you are. I try my best to be considerate of everyone’s feelings ... I hope you will be, too.”

Doing things “to be seen of men” may be yet another root of strange behavior. It probably explains some of the Corinthian behavior. And it was surely the cardinal sin of the Pharisees. “Everything they do is done for men to see” (Matthew 23:5-7). When people have not yet found their inner self-worth in Christ, they will seek it in performance

before men. When the honor that comes from God is not sufficient, they will seek to be seen of men, hopefully to be honored and applauded by them. This is their “search for significance.” I find myself concerned when some are not always content to be on the sidelines, but must rather be in the limelight. Some of the Corinthians “limelighted” themselves; and so Paul sought to “sideline” them—“the speaker should *keep quiet ... and speak to himself and God*” (14:28). I remember the time when Pastor John Kilpatrick stopped a man right in his tracks in one of the Brownsville revival meetings. Pastor John told him to sit down and “keep quiet.” I thought that was rather bold leadership, but leadership that was appropriate and needed.

Another cause of strange behavior in seasons of spiritual outpouring is what I call “scapegoating”—“the Spirit made me do it.” People do odd things because they feel “compelled by the Holy Spirit” to speak or act a certain way. The probable fact of the matter is that the Holy Spirit really is *moving upon them*, but this is the way they are choosing to express that moving. And the greater fact of the matter is that they really can choose to respond differently! It is within their power to do so! There are some instances in Scripture where God’s grace is seemingly irresistible. King Saul’s prophetic

experiences in 1 Samuel 10:9-11 and 19:23-24 may be an example in the Old Testament, and Saul of Tarsus’ Damascus road conversion in the New Testament may be another example. Saul apparently had *no control* over his conversion. But when this same Paul himself later corrects the Corinthian behavioral irregularities, he takes off in a different vein.

People can control what is happening to them and through them! “The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of the prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace” (1 Corinthians 14:32-33). The context—a detail of regulations as to how spiritual gifts and anointings were to best

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function, not in disorder, but for the edification of others—that context helps us to understand Paul’s statement in verse 32. *The Message* translates verse 32: “If you *choose to speak*, you’re also responsible for *how and when you speak*.” W. Robertson Smith in *The Prophets of Israel*, comments: “In the New Testament Paul lays down the principle that, in true prophecy, *self-consciousness, and self-command are never lost*. ‘The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.’”

A final Corinthian problem which may have contributed to some of their erratic behavior is their going “beyond what is written.” The Corinthians were a highly charismatic church; they “came behind in no gift,” but they were not always careful to remain within the channels of the river of Holy Scripture. They *went beyond what was written*. Consequently, Paul admonished them with a familiar word spoken in the first century—“learn from us the meaning of the saying, ‘Do not go beyond what is written’” (1 Corinthians 4:6). “It is written” was very important in Jesus’ own life (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10), and “it is written” should be the measuring rod for all we say or do when God is moving upon

us. “All Scripture is God-breathed (‘inspired by God,’ KJV)” and, in itself, is sufficient “so that (we) may be *thoroughly equipped for every good work* (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

If a behavior is foreign to the Holy Scriptures, we have grounds to question its validity. And surely *anything*—any move, any movement, any manifestation, or any ministry—that diminishes the centrality and supremacy of our Lord Jesus Christ is to be set aside, for the focus of all spiritual experience and expression, and the very *heart* of all Holy Scripture, is “that in *everything* (Jesus) might have the supremacy (‘the preeminence,’ KJV)” (Colossians 1:18)!

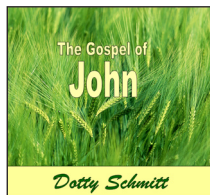
Problems in various moves of God often do not come from the members of that particular congregation where the move is taking place. But problems can come from those who come in from the outside and are not used to the discipline of that particular congregation. It’s great to have visitors; it’s wonderful to host seekers—but some, and probably only a few, come with a lot of emotional baggage. They travel across the country to be where God is moving, hungry for His presence. And without leadership-oversight

they can hijack a meeting by strange and distracting doings and take the meeting right off course.

And so these are some of the reasons why revivals are often messy—an “off-center” spirituality, an immaturity, a subconscious imitation of others, a misguided understanding of “freedom,” doing things to be “seen by men,” a failure to realize “the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets,” and going “beyond what is written.” The challenge in all of this is for us not to throw the baby out with the proverbial bathwater. We must be careful not to discount what God is doing, as unconventional as it may appear at times, because of some human extremes. And let us rather believe that our Lord can speak to both us and our leadership to help sort things out.

By His grace, we will cherish the move of God! We will honor the presence of our Father! And we will offer an acceptable sacrifice of worship to Him who is so worthy! “O Lord, revive Thy work in the midst of the years” (Habakkuk 3:2, KJV). †

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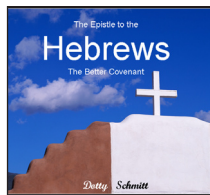


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