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The Need for Spiritual Discernment Concerning Revivals

We have more than a health crisis this past year; we also have also an economic (with the massive loss of jobs), mental (statistics of people with increasing depression, phobia and anxiety disorders) and a profound spiritual crisis too where many are either not attending church services or some are disillusioned and even backslided or deceived. On top of these, there were claims of healings by some so-called prophets, boasting of supernatural signs and wonders in our times in the name of God. It is undeniable that there have been authentic revivals both in biblical times and often in church history (for example, the 18th century Great Awakening in England and America during the times of George Whitefield, John and Charles Wesley and the authenticated reviving work of Jonathan Edwards). But what about the frequent hype or talk of 'revival' that has been circulating in so-called modern day liberal and Charismatic circles for the last few decades?



There were the Toronto and Brownsville Pensacola so-called revivals of the 1990s, the infamous Alpha course that is without repentance and other miraculous claims. We were bombarded for a while with the so-called Holy Spirit laughing phenomena and a 'latter day rain' effect of sorts with people making strange animal noises, falling to and wriggling on the ground in an unbecoming manner. Was this a true revival from God as some claimed or something else?

The fact is that, in these last days, believers will be exposed to spiritual charlatans who subtly or openly mislead men with falsehood. We will need to evaluate spiritual claims and phenomena very carefully. Recently a notorious megachurch pastor in the US, Pat Robertson predicted that Trump would win the Presidential election as he claimed that God spoke to him. The final results proved otherwise.



The following thirteen questions may help with an evaluation, to see if an event is truly a Holy Ghost revival.

1. Is there too much emphasis on the gifts and manifestations of the Holy Spirit, at the expense of Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

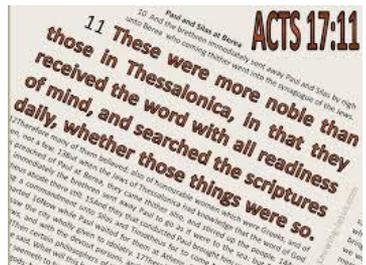
Does the speaker speak almost exclusively of the temporal gifts of the Spirit, and never uplift Christ as the only Saviour or teach the Trinity? In the New Testament (especially John 14-16; Acts 1:8; 1 John 4-5), the Holy Spirit's main ministry is described as bearing witness to Jesus Christ and the gospel of salvation.

If there is no true witness to Jesus Christ, then it is not of the Holy Spirit. 1 John 4:1 says, 'Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world'.

2. Is there a good emphasis on Scripture? Is there solid, lively and convicting expository preaching?

Is there clear doctrinal teaching and preaching from the pulpit, or just stage showmanship and much celebrity presence and action? If the Bible (and its gospel truth) including the teaching of the depravity of man and sin and the need for repentance are not emphasised at all, it is likely that it is man-centred religion.

There is no genuine revival without the clear preaching of the Word, and true repentance and faith in Christ in response. Be alert and watchful and examine the Scriptures to see if what is preached is true (Acts 17:11).



3. Is there uncritical acceptance of whatever is going on?

1 Thess 5:19-22 tells us (in the context of issues like prophecy) to test or examine or prove everything carefully. John warns us, straight after mentioning that the



Holy Spirit bears witness to Jesus, to test and examine the spirits (or the teaching) to see if they are from God based on their doctrine not claims or actions (1 John 3:22–4:3). Cult groups like the Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses are notorious for misleading unsuspecting young Christians into their fold and the latest New Age Movement too.

Testing and examining a claim or a situation prudently is demonstrating submission to this counsel of Scripture. Believers should not be gullible and accept everything that is said (Acts 17:11) without clearly assessing it in the light of the Word of God.

4. Is the primary emphasis on 'God, bless or prosper me', or obedience and submission to God?

Is there a 'health and wealth' emphasis that centres on your social, physical, mental or emotional well-being? There is a huge church in Singapore that teaches this and it appeals to the crowds without a biblical foundation. There is a certain megachurch pastor in Singapore who advocates taking the holy communion more often teaching that it is for our physical healing of sickness and our bodily well-being, not just to remember the Lord. Is that taught in the scriptures (1 Cor 11:23-30)? We need to search out the truth of it and be discerning of such teachings.



Jesus Christ stressed the importance of obedience and self-denying surrender to God. He indicated that there will be some who mistakenly think they are saved and hence right with God because of their involvement in supernatural activities (allegedly

in Christ's name). But to their horror they will find out that they were not accepted by Christ in the end. It is a serious thing to note for the Lord said he never knew them and they are sent into eternal condemnation (Matt 7:21-27).

The centre of our faith is our belief in Christ as our Lord and God, with submission to His will and His word, and not our own physical well-being.

5. Is there an unbiblical emphasis on intense or ecstatic experiences?

For example, there are claims that some are being 'slain in the spirit' (people falling backwards with some in an embarrassing manner) with catchers waiting behind. We fail to find a single clear teaching in the Bible of this practice. However, it did happen to Eli, whose heart was not right with God (1 Sam 4:18), and he fell backwards and to those Roman soldiers who came to arrest Jesus (John 18:6). We certainly do not want to be identified with either of them.

Falling backwards is certainly not normative for any Christian at all. It is impossible to prove from Scripture that it is an authentic mark of spirituality for there is none.

6. Is 'laughing in the spirit' accepted as a legitimate expression of spirituality?

We remembered the Pentecostal pastor Rodney Howard Browne who advocated unrestrained hilarity and laughter as a sign of the Spirit's blessing in 1994 when he came to Singapore. He claimed to have healed with holy laughter but he publicly disgraced the church in the eyes of the unbelieving world as the Times magazine published it in one of its issues, making a mockery of the unproven incident.

There is no biblical justification for such an idea. Certainly, joy in the Lord is good (Phil 4:4) but choosing to rejoice in the Lord reverently and prayerfully, and worship Him in spirit and truth, is not the same as receiving a 'gift' of delirious, godless laughter. Rather the Bible speaks of being sober and of a broken and contrite spirit in worship and with remorseful evangelical repentance (Psa, 51:14, 2Cor 7:10).

Such irreverent behaviour incurs ridicule and dishonour for God's name. 'The joy of the Lord is your strength' (Nehemiah 8:10) was

said in the context of a repentant, revived post-exilic Jewish community who had been weeping over their failures and sins.

Such texts taken out of context cannot justify foolish behaviour during God honouring sabbath worship.

7. Is there an emphasis on ‘manifestations’?

In a sabbath service, it is wise to note how much is so-called visions from God, dreams and so-called prophecy promoted? How much time in the worship service is devoted to ecstatic experience or dancing or loud irreverent jarring music? Is there clear biblical teaching from the Word of God on Christ and the cessation of sign gifts like tongue-speaking (see Heb 2:1-4, for example and 1Cor 13:8)? Are tongue-speaking, healings, dreams, visions and unproven prophecies given more emphasis than Christ and the faithful expository preaching of His word and repentance?

8. Is ‘prophecy’ used to seduce and spiritually blackmail worshippers?

There is a central place in the church for the authoritative preaching of God’s Word (1 Cor 1:21-23). But so-called unproven man-made ‘prophecy’ which rails against people and churches in impressive words to enthrall and impress people and are not consistent with the teaching and practice of the word of God is highly suspicious and we need to be careful. Note the example of the false prophet, Harold Camping who predicted the coming of Christ in May 2011 (later changed to Oct 2011). He subsequently suffered a severe stroke. Deut 18:18-22 has some good advice for us today about false prophets and their consequences.

We are not to believe a different gospel, even if presented by an angel (Gal 1:6-9). Nor are we to be deceived by those who derive their authority solely from their experiences or some rituals or new-fangled practices or unsound doctrines like physical healing in the Lord’s Supper by a notorious mega church pastor (Col 2:18, 1Cor 11:23-32).

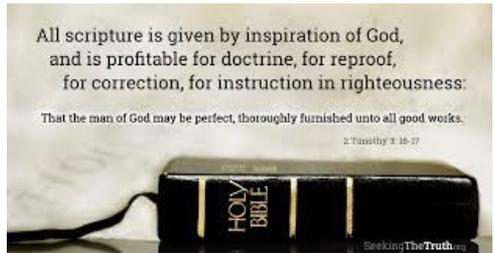
9. Is the worship ascetic or mystical in orientation?

Remember, when God created the material universe it was good (Gen 1 and 2). It is not the physical which is evil, but its abuse. Similarly, it is not just the 'spiritual' which is good, but the proper use of the spiritual.

Beware of mystical or emotional experiences in religion that are at its root unsound and unbiblical. Objective faith in God and His word, and not subjective feelings or experiences, should rule the church in its our sabbath worship according to the regulative principle in the Bible.

10. Is there an undue emphasis on the sensational?

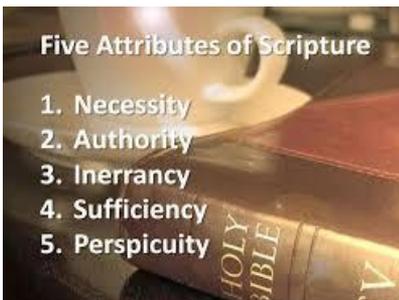
Personal experience of Christ is crucial, and God works with people as individuals in a way that they experience, but are we ultimately basing our faith on personal experiences or on the authority of God's inerrant, sufficient Word?



Do not let your heart be ruled merely by the sensational — which is always unreliable and liable to change. God gave us the Scriptures to teach us how to live godly lives (2 Tim 3:16-17).

11. Is the bizarre being confused with the truly supernatural?

God certainly did some supernatural things in the Bible. But some things in the Bible were never intended to be normative for Christian experience. Miracles, signs and healings were practiced by the prophets, Christ and the apostles before the



completion of the canon of the word of God- the Bible but are not for ordinary believers today. After the completion of the canon of the 66 books of the Bible by A.D.100, all these sign gifts had ceased as taught clearly by the apostle Paul and John (1Cor 13:8, Rev 22:18-20).

The Bible alone is our only infallible rule for faith and conduct. If something is claimed to have happened, look to the Bible, check it out and study it in context and examine it carefully if it were so. Do not let the extraordinary and the supernatural supplant normative Christian living in daily obedience and trust in God.

12. Is excitement about God being confused with true conversions?

New friends' general interest about God is wonderful. May God draw all of us closer to Christ and mould us into His image. Simon in Acts 8 was excited with the gifts of the Holy Spirit but Peter and John found that he was not even saved after his baptism (Acts 8:13-24). It is misleading to use statistics of superficial interest in the things of God and even zeal or short-term excitement as true conversion; they are not the same thing. We need to know the correct biblical doctrine of salvation and not be confused by cheap grace and false or defective unvalidated conversions without evidence of repentance.

13. Can the dramatic claims be substantiated?

We often hear or read of fantastic claims of miracles and healings and so-called conversions. Are the claims for so-called prophecies, visions, healings and numbers converted capable of being verified objectively? Are they exaggerated or subjectively construed by excited people? It is much easier to seem to 'cure' backache or headaches or a psychosomatic illness than restore amputated limbs or heal total blindness or cancer!

The author was told once by someone of a claim that a particular megachurch pastor had resurrected a dead person. When asked for concrete evidence, he shied away and said that particular healer did not want to boast about it. He was not able to give any concrete evidence or substantiated facts.

The book, *The Healing Epidemic* (by Dr Peter Masters; Wakeman Trust) explains that many of these so-called healings have not been authenticated and are highly questionable with an examination of so-called healings by a renowned British haematologist in the last chapter of the book. He found many of the claims wanting. There is also the book, *Strange Fire* (by John MacArthur) worthy of our study on this subject, among others.

Conclusion

While we desire revival in our times, we need to be careful and prudent in these last perilous days even in the midst of a tumultuous health crisis. We are living in days of counterfeit religion and deception, even in the religious realm in this post-modern world today. Regenerate people need to be careful and discerning, yet not cynical and sceptical for the wrong reasons. Pray that we may have the godly wisdom and discernment to know the difference and to also warn others. Be revived by biblical means and be vigilant of religious compromise and spiritual deception in these last perilous days.

Jack Sin



Comments on the COVID19 Pandemic Book

“Thanks very much, Jack, for your book (co-authored with your wife), and other articles, which arrived. They reflect your faithful concern as a pastor, and communicator of Scriptural truths to a wider readership. I look forward to reading your book. “

Prof Ernest Chew (Elder/Historian/ Associate Senior Fellow)

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“Thank you for the update that your book has been read by brethren from different countries during this pandemic and the Spanish version will be published soon, God willing. We shall let our friends know about the book. May God bless and keep you all safe.”

Rev Dr and Mrs Ed Paaue  
Adelaide, Australia

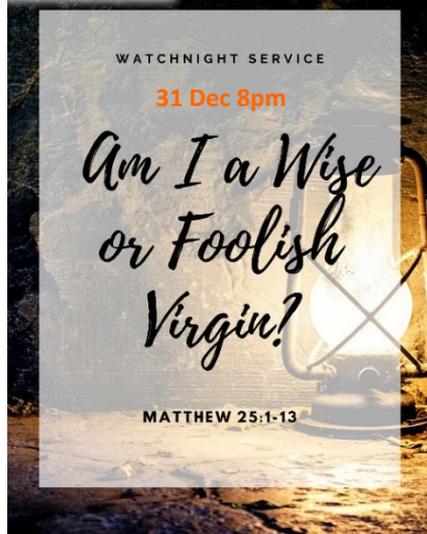
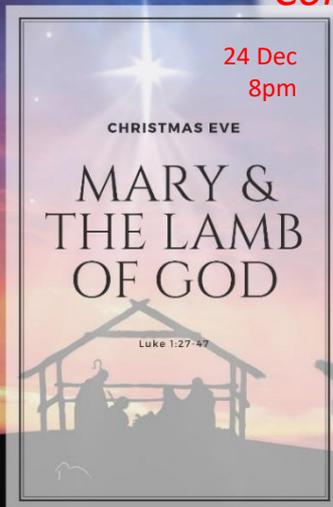
**PROPHETIC AND PRACTICAL INSIGHTS  
FROM ISAIAH FOR TODAY**

Lord's Day Programme from Oct - Dec 2020

**DECEMBER**

- 6 The Only One True God of the World (Isaiah 45:5-28)
- 13\* The Call to Extend the Kingdom of God. (Isaiah 54:1-17)
- 20 The Foundation for Contentment (Isaiah 55:1-13)
- 24 Christmas Eve: Mary and the Lamb of God (Luke 1:27-47)
- 27 Reforms through the Hand of God (Isaiah 59:1-21)
- 31\* WATCHNIGHT SERVICE: Am I a Wise or Foolish Virgin?  
(Matthew 25:1-13)

*Come & Join Us!*



## Memory Verse

*Isaiah 54:5* For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name;  
and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel;  
The God of the whole earth shall he be called.

## Announcements

1. Welcome to our Worship Service! For our visitors, do leave us your contact numbers in our guest book before you leave.
2. Rev Jack Sin speaks today on “**The Call to Extend the Kingdom of God**” (Isa 54: 1-17).
3. Rev Jack Sin speaks next Sunday on “**The Foundation for Contentment**” (Isa 55: 1-13).
4. Sunday School classes continues in church after the worship service:
  - WCF Shorter Catechism Class – Pastor Jack
  - “Rules for Walking in Fellowship by John Owen” – Dn Choo Siang
  - Studies in Leviticus – Dr Kwong Leen
5. Chinese Fellowship meets on Sunday night at 7pm via Zoom with both local and overseas brethren. We have commenced a new series of studies and discussions on History of the Church. Do join us!
6. Pastor & Kin Kheng will be ministering via Zoom at New Covenant BPCI, Bangalore’s Family Retreat & Children’s program respectively on 15 & 16 Dec.
7. Do send your prayer items to Pastor and join us for Church Prayer Meeting on Wed at 8pm via Zoom.
8. The Pandemic book can be purchased through Dn Yue Kay (Hp: +65 97450311) or via email at sovereignhopebpc@gmail.com.
9. Those who have a testimony to share may submit to Pastor for the weekly.
10. Pastor is still available for counselling via WhatsApp, Email or Mobile.
11. Love gifts, Offering and Tithes to the Lord can be given in the following ways:
  - **Cheque** payable to **Sovereign Hope Bible Presbyterian Church** and mail to church address. (Kindly write the full name of the church as indicated.)
  - **Fund transfer** to Church **UOB** Account **392-308-825-1**
  - **PayNow** to Church UEN: **T19SS0116FSOV**

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