

# Discernment: The Safeguard of Revival



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *John 17:3; 1 John 2:3–6; Matt. 23:27, 28; 2 Thess. 2:9–12; 1 Cor. 12:4–7.*

**Memory Text:** “Consider how I love Your precepts; revive me, O LORD, according to Your lovingkindness. The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever” (*Psalm 119:159, 160, NKJV*).

Early in my ministry I studied with a family in rural Tennessee. One day a large man walked into the room smoking a big cigar. He then declared that the Lord had healed him from lung cancer!

I have reflected upon this experience often. This man sincerely believed that the Holy Spirit had miraculously healed him. However, did his belief that he was healed make it true? Are signs and wonders always evidence of the Holy Spirit's working? Can we base our faith on signs and wonders alone? What role might signs and wonders have in a false revival?

In the context of revival, we need to ask, Is it possible that the devil can create a false religious excitement and leave the impression that a genuine revival has occurred?

This week we will study the spiritual indicators of genuine revival and contrast them with the obvious signs of false ones. Knowing the difference between the two will help to save us from the enemy's delusions.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 24.*

## God's Will and His Word

All true spirituality is focused on knowing God and doing His will (*John 17:3, Heb. 10:7*). Any so-called “revival” that focuses on experience rather than commitment to obey God’s Word misses the mark completely. The Holy Spirit will never lead us where God’s Word does not. The Holy Spirit leads us into the Word (*2 Tim. 3:15, 16*). The Word of God is the foundation and heart of all true revival.

**What** do the following passages in Psalm 119 reveal about revival and God’s Word? List all the spiritual qualities that God’s Word develops in our lives. *Ps. 119:25, 28, 49, 50, 67, 81, 105, 116, 130, 154*. What do these promises mean in practical terms in our experience with the Lord?

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In Jesus’ sermon about the Bread of Life, He explained the essence of all revival and the foundation of all spiritual life. He declared, “ ‘It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life’ ” (*John 6:63, NKJV*). Jesus’ statement is extremely significant. The Holy Spirit, who is the Source of all spiritual revival, speaks through God’s Word in order to give to those who grasp it by faith a deep spiritual life. Revival occurs when the Holy Spirit impresses Jesus’ words upon our minds. This is why the Savior said, “ ‘ “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” ’ ” (*Matt. 4:4, NKJV*).

“In many of the revivals which have occurred during the last half century, the same influences have been at work, to a greater or less degree, that will be manifest in the more extensive movements of the future. There is an emotional excitement, a mingling of the true with the false, that is well adapted to mislead. Yet none need be deceived. In the light of God’s word it is not difficult to determine the nature of these movements. Wherever men neglect the testimony of the Bible, turning away from those plain, soul-testing truths which require self-denial and renunciation of the world, there we may be sure that God’s blessing is not bestowed.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 464.

The essence of true revival is discovering God’s will as manifest in God’s Word. Jesus lived a life filled with the Holy Spirit. From His birth to His death, He was led and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

## God's Love and His Law

Revival is all about knowing Jesus. It is a reawakening of the spiritual faculties of the soul. It is a personal and vital experience with the Savior. Knowing Jesus—really knowing Him as a friend—is the essence of all revival. From the depth of his personal experience with Jesus, the apostle Paul shared that he is praying for the Ephesians to “know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (*Eph. 3:19, NKJV*).

This is in contrast to the story of the end-time virgins, five of whom had an outer form of godliness and religion but lacked an intimate experience with Jesus. Referring to their great need, Jesus said, “‘Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you’” (*Matt. 25:12, NKJV*).

Knowing God always leads to obedience. God's law reveals His love. A deeper relationship with Christ leads to a greater desire to please Christ. Obedience is the fruit of love. The more we love Him, the more we will desire to obey Him. Any so-called revival that does not emphasize repentance for the times that we have willfully broken His law is suspect. Religious fervor may stimulate a temporary religious high, but lasting spiritual change will be lacking.

**For** the apostle John, what are the evidences that one really knows God? *1 John 2:3–6; 4:7, 8, 20, 21.*

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In these passages John makes two crucial points. First, knowing God leads to keeping His commandments. Second, loving God leads to loving one another. John's point is clear. Genuine spirituality results in a changed life. The heart of revival is not a warm sensation of feeling close to Jesus. It is a transformed life filled with the joy of serving Jesus. God's great goal in all revivals is to draw us closer to Him, to deepen our surrender to His purpose for our lives, and to release us for witness and ministry in His cause.

**How are you in your own personal relationships? What do those relationships tell you about your own walk with the Lord? In what ways might you need to progress in both your relationship with God and with others?**

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## Formalism, Fanaticism, and Faith

One of the challenges of true revival is breaking through the icy surface of cold formalism while at the same time avoiding the fiery flames of fanaticism. Formalism is rigidly locked in the status quo. It is satisfied with the external husks of religion while it denies the living reality of faith. Fanaticism tends to go to extremes. It goes off on religious tangents. It tends to be unbalanced, focusing on one aspect of faith to the neglect of all others. Fanaticism is often self-righteous and judgmental. The apostle Paul longed that the Christian church “no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting” (*Eph. 4:14, NKJV*).

**What** do we learn about cold formalism in Jesus’ condemnation of the Pharisees? *Matt. 23:27, 28; Luke 11:39, 40; Mark 7:5–9.*

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**What** do we learn about those who thought that signs and wonders proved that they were Jesus’ faithful followers? *Matt. 7:21–23.*

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The deeper issue in both of these experiences is the commitment of the heart. Signs and wonders can never take the place of authentic biblical faith. They are not substitutes for surrendering to the will and Word of God. The essence of real revival is a faith so deep that it leads to an obedient life that is committed to do God’s will. A biblically based revival echoes John’s words, “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith” (*1 John 5:4, NKJV*).

“What kind of faith is it that overcomes the world? It is that faith which makes Christ your own personal Saviour—that faith which, recognizing your helplessness, your utter inability to save yourself, takes hold of the Helper who is mighty to save, as your only hope.” —Ellen G. White, *Reflecting Christ*, p. 21.

**Which side do you tend to lean toward: formalism and tradition or experience and excitement? If, perhaps, you lean too much toward one side or the other, how can you find the right balance?**

## Ministry and Miracles

False revivals often place their major emphasis on miracles. Genuine revivals focus on ministry. False revivals emphasize spectacular signs and wonders; genuine revivals recognize that the greatest miracle is a changed life.

The healing miracles of Jesus testified to the fact that He was the Messiah. As our compassionate Redeemer, the Savior was concerned with alleviating human suffering. But He was even more concerned with the salvation of everyone whom He touched with His healing grace. The purpose of Jesus' redemptive ministry was to "seek and save" lost humankind (Luke 19:10). Speaking to the religious leaders regarding the paralytic, Jesus declared, " 'But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins' "—then He said to the paralytic, " 'Arise, take up your bed and go to your house' " (*Matt. 9:6, NKJV*). The crowd's response to this miracle was to glorify God (*Matt. 9:8*).

Miracles were an outgrowth of Jesus' redemptive ministry, but they were not the main reason He came to earth.

**What** can we learn from these texts about how people can be deceived in the last days? *2 Thess. 2:9–12; Matt. 24:11–13, 24; Rev. 19:20.*

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These people are deceived by false miracles "because they did not receive the love of the truth." When the desire for the spectacular is far more important than the desire for a new life in Christ, the mind is open to deception. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus concludes with Jesus' insightful words, " 'But he said to him, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead" ' " (*Luke 16:31, NKJV*). In other words, spectacular signs and marvelous wonders can never take the place of understanding and then following God's Word. Obedience to God is primary; signs and wonders, if and when they come, are always only secondary.

**What kind of miracles have you experienced in your own life, in your own walk with the Lord? What have you learned from them? How important are they to your faith?**

## Fruits and Gifts

**What** are some of the prime reasons that God gives the gifts of the Holy Spirit to His church? *1 Cor. 12:4–7, Rom. 12:4–8, Eph. 4:11–16.*

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The gifts of the Holy Spirit may be divided into two large categories: some gifts are qualities, other gifts are callings. For example, the gifts of helps, hospitality, exhortation, and teaching are qualities that God imparts to individual believers (*Rom. 12:6–8*). The gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers are callings given to individual believers (*Eph. 4:11, 12*). Both categories serve a similar purpose. They have been imparted by the Holy Spirit to strengthen the spiritual life of the church and equip it for mission. Spiritual gifts are not an end in themselves. They have been given by God for the benefit of His church.

**What** does the apostle Paul mean when he uses the expression “Walk in the Spirit” in Galatians 5:16? Read Galatians 5:22–25, and list each fruit that comes from walking in the Spirit. *See also John 15:1–7.*

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Any so-called revival that has little interest in the fruit of the Spirit but is obsessed with possessing the gifts of the Spirit is dangerous. If God gave the gifts of the Spirit in abundance to believers who were not manifesting the fruit of the Spirit, the church would become the center of selfish exhibitionism. For God to turn on Heaven’s power when the spiritual power lines are frayed would produce only disastrous results. Beware of movements that concentrate on the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit rather than on obedience to God’s will and a transformed character that reveals the fruit of the Spirit.

**What do you say to someone who has experienced what he or she judges to be a supernatural manifestation from God? How can you help him or her to know if it truly were from God or from the other side? How does our understanding of the reality of the great controversy help us when we seek to understand who or what can be behind miracles?**

**Further Study:** “The promise of the Spirit is not appreciated as it should be. Its fulfillment is not realized as it might be. It is the absence of the Spirit that makes the gospel ministry so powerless. Learning, talents, eloquence, every natural or acquired endowment, may be possessed; but without the presence of the Spirit of God, no heart will be touched, no sinner be won to Christ. On the other hand, if they are connected with Christ, if the gifts of the Spirit are theirs, the poorest and most ignorant of His disciples will have a power that will tell upon hearts. God makes them the channel for the outworking of the highest influence in the universe.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 328.

“The apostle’s earnest words of entreaty were not fruitless. The Holy Spirit wrought with mighty power, and many whose feet had wandered into strange paths, returned to their former faith in the gospel. Henceforth they were steadfast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free. In their lives were revealed the fruits of the Spirit—‘love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.’ The name of God was glorified, and many were added to the number of believers throughout that region.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 388.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Dwell more on the contrast between cold formalism and unbridled fanaticism. Or, are they always in contrast? That is, could a church be fanatical and coldly formal at the same time? If so, how might that be made manifest? Why would either extreme, or both, be detrimental to revival and reformation? What about your own local church? Where does it stand in this area? How could you help it to find the right balance?
- 2 What evidence, if any, can we see of false revivals going on in the world? How can we know that they are false? On the other hand, would it be wrong to believe that God is working a revival among those who, though loving the Lord, don’t know the things that we do?
- 3 In class, go over your answer to Thursday’s question regarding someone who thinks that he or she has had a supernatural experience with God. What can you learn from each other’s answers?

## Mila's Prayers

Mila [MEE-lah] is six years old, but already she's a prayer warrior. She prays for people until God answers.

One day at school Mila saw her teachers outside during their break smoking cigarettes. Mila knows that smoking is dangerous, so right there she prayed for them. "Dear Jesus," she said, "please help my teachers know that smoking is bad for them. Help them to stop smoking before it makes them sick. Amen."

That evening when Father arrived home, he saw Mila sitting on the couch with her head bowed. He wondered if something was wrong. He touched her and asked if she was OK. Mila looked up and said, "I'm fine. I'm just praying for my teachers. They smoke, and I don't want them to get sick."

Daddy knew about Mila's prayer ministry. He sat down beside her and asked, "Would you pray for a woman at work? She smokes too." Mila smiled and bowed her head. She prayed for Daddy's friend at work and for her teachers. Mila kept praying for her teachers and her father's friend every day.

Several weeks later, Daddy came home from work and told Mila that his friend at work had stopped smoking. The woman told him that one day she had suddenly lost her desire to smoke and hadn't smoked again. Daddy knew that the woman had tried to stop smoking many times before, but she had failed.

"What day did you stop smoking?" he asked. The woman thought for a minute and then told him the date. "That was the day after my daughter started praying for you," he said. Daddy told the woman that Mila had been praying that she would stop smoking. She was surprised that a child's prayer could help her to stop smoking when nothing else could.

"My teachers still smoke," Mila said. "And I'm still praying for them. Sometimes I tell them that smoking is bad for them and that I'm concerned about them. I've told them that I'm praying for them. My teacher says that she wants to stop smoking," Mila added. "I'm sure God will answer my prayers."

God answers our prayers, but He never forces someone to do something against their wishes. When we pray for others, God works in their hearts and in ours to answer those prayers. When we pray that people will meet God and accept Jesus' love, we must be willing to help make that happen if God calls us.

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