

Discernment: The Safeguard of Revival



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?

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.*

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?

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.*

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

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 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.*

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.*

The gifts of the Holy Spirit might 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 its 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.*

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?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *1 John 2:3–6*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Discern the difference between the elements of true and false revival and understand that true revival avoids formalism on the one hand and fanaticism on the other, while leading to loving obedience of God’s commands.

Feel: Nurture the desire to know Christ personally, manifest the fruit of the Spirit, and experience true revival in his or her life.

Do: Honor God supremely by living a godly life so that God may entrust him or her with His spiritual gifts in Pentecostal power.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Relationship Between Revival and Obedience

- A** How does an experience of genuine revival relate to God’s law?
- B** What danger is there that an emphasis on obedience will lead us to fall into the trap of legalism and formalism?
- C** How can we avoid fanaticism and sensational emotionalism in true revival?

II. Feel: Miracles, True and False

- A** Throughout the lesson there is an emphasis on discerning the difference between true and false miracles. What danger is there in being so consumed with the identification of the false manifestations of the Spirit that we miss the true miracles that God is working?
- B** In what ways can we foster attitudes of humble submission in order to prepare for the genuine revival and subsequent miracles that God will work in these last days?

III. Do: Glorifying God—the Essence of Revival

- A** Given that the Holy Spirit is the Author and Originator of all revival, how should we relate to His promptings and guidance in order that we may prepare to receive His power in its fullness?
- B** In light of the mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the end time, why is it so essential to seek to glorify God completely in our lives?

► **Summary:** God longs to pour out His Holy Spirit in Pentecostal power on His church at the end time so that His work may be finished on earth. As we seek this mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit, desiring to glorify Him through our godly lives, the longed-for revival will come.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1**—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Matthew 7:21–24*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The authentic fruit of genuine revival does not manifest itself in signs and wonders, emotional feelings, or sensational miracles. Revival is rooted in a deep relationship with Jesus, resulting in the fruit of the Spirit. It is shown in a life of unselfish service. Miracles may accompany revival, but they are not the evidence of revival; a godly, obedient lifestyle is.

Just for Teachers: Lead your class members in a discussion of why a genuine revival is always accompanied by a changed life. Point out that God does work miracles. In Jesus’ ministry, miracles testified to the divine power of God, and they will do the same today. Nevertheless, miracles alone do not confirm the authenticity of a revival. Why?

Opening Activity: During the sixteenth-century Reformation, the devil raised up fanatics to counteract the work of Martin Luther. These radical extremists claimed that their consciences were subject to God alone through the impressions of His Spirit. They believed that they held direct supernatural conversations with heaven and were instructed by the angel Gabriel. These fanatics drew scores of supporters and created quite a stir of excitement in Wittenberg. Throughout the Reformation, Luther faced fiery fanaticism on one side and icy formalism on the other. Commenting on the ways in which Luther met these heretical movements, Ellen G. White adds, “Fearlessly did Luther defend the gospel from the attacks which came from every quarter. The word of God proved itself a weapon mighty in every conflict.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 193.

Have your class complete the following statements:

- A. Fanaticism is like having a car without _____.
- B. Formalism is like having a car without _____.
- C. Which would you rather have: a car without power or a car without brakes?

Answers: (A) Brakes (B) Power

Question for Discussion: Why is it so dangerous to depend on supernatural signs, wonders, and miracles in order to determine truth?

► **STEP 2—Explore****Bible Commentary**

Just for Teachers: This section reviews the lesson’s three major points in three passages of Scripture.

- A. A godly, Christ-centered life of obedience and service reveals the genuine working of the Holy Spirit.
- B. Although miracles may accompany a true revival, they are not necessarily evidence of true revival because Satan can create counterfeit signs and wonders.
- C. The fruit of the Spirit must be revealed in a life in order for the gifts of the Spirit to be fully manifested.

I. The Evidence of True Revival (*Review 1 John 2:2–6 with your class.*)

Evidently, some forms of heresy had infiltrated the church in John’s day, and the apostle was concerned. Most likely, varying groups of Gnostics had made some headway in the mingling of nonbiblical teachings with the truth of God’s Word. The Gnostics denied the Incarnation and taught that Christ only seemed to have a human body. In the opinion of these false teachers, knowledge, which is the core meaning of the word *Gnosticism*, was the essence of salvation. John met these heretics by focusing on Christ’s birth, death, and resurrection. He set forth the reality that “knowing God” is much more than an intellectual assent. It goes far beyond a mental exercise. Nor is it cold formalism. It is a personal relationship with Jesus. For John, knowing Jesus meant experiencing His grace personally, loving Him supremely, and obeying Him wholeheartedly. John uses the words *know* and *known* throughout his epistle to mean experiencing Jesus in this way (*see 1 John 2:4, 5, 13; 3:1–3; 4:2*).

John, in these words, highlights His understanding of what it really means to know Christ: “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (*1 John 2:6, NKJV*). The word for “abide” in the original language is *meno*. It means to continue to be present or to remain. It speaks of a continual abiding or remaining in Christ’s presence—a deep knowing of Him—which leads to a transformed, obedient life. This is the heart of true revival.

Consider This: Throughout John’s epistles, the greatest evidence of being a true disciple of Christ is a life of loving obedience. John also highlights the necessity of obedience at the close of the passage in Revelation’s end-time prophecy of the three angels’ messages in Revelation 14:12. Read

this passage and discuss the relationship between loving God supremely and obeying Him completely.

II. The Evidence of the Counterfeit Revival *(Review 2 Thessalonians 2:9–12 with your class.)*

Our passage outlines the strategy of the lawless one, or the antichrist. He will work with “all power, signs, and lying wonders” (*2 Thess. 2:9, NKJV*). Jesus warned His disciples about the cunning devices of the evil one by declaring, “ ‘For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect’ ” (*Matt. 24:24, NKJV*). The Bible’s last book, Revelation, confirms this frightful reality. Satan will use miracles to deceive multitudes and lead them to receive the mark of the beast (*see Rev. 13:13, 14; 16:14, 19:20*). Note carefully why millions will be deceived by these false miracles. It is “because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved”; and because they “did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness,” they accepted a strong delusion and believed a lie (*2 Thess. 2:10–12, NKJV*).

The Bible is our safeguard. It is our defense against the wiles of the enemy. This is why Ellen G. White writes, “None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict. To every soul will come the searching test: Shall I obey God rather than men? The decisive hour is even now at hand. Are our feet planted on the rock of God’s immutable word? Are we prepared to stand firm in defense of the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus?”—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 593, 594.

Consider This: Understanding God’s Word and applying its principles to our lives will keep us secure in the crisis ahead. How can we be sure that we understand the Bible correctly and are not misled by false interpretations? (*See John 7:17.*)

III. The Fruit and the Gifts of the Spirit *(Review Galatians 5:22, 23 and 1 Corinthians 12:4–8 with your class.)*

The fruit of the Holy Spirit is the character qualities that the Holy Spirit imparts to our lives as we fellowship with Jesus in prayer, Bible study, and witness. These qualities reveal an authentic Christian experience. They are not the natural impulses of the human heart. They are truly “the fruit of the Spirit.” The gifts of the Holy Spirit are divinely imparted qualities or redirected natural talents with which the Holy Spirit equips believers for their ministry of witness and service. Without the fruit of the Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit could easily degenerate into selfish exhibitionism. The New Testament

teaches us to seek the fruit of the Spirit and to allow God to give us the gifts of the Spirit as He desires. In His infinite wisdom, He knows which are the gifts that we will use in the most useful way in order to bless Christ's body and enlarge His kingdom.

Consider This: If we concentrate on receiving the gifts of the Spirit rather than exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit, we are open for the deceptions of the evil one. If we focus on knowing God, submitting to His will, and obeying Him, He will impart heaven's richest gifts to us so that we may bless others. Why is it important to focus on the fruit of the Spirit rather than to seek the gifts of the Spirit?

► **STEP 3**—Apply

Just for Teachers: Read Galatians 5:16 and lead your class in a discussion of what it truly means to “walk in the Spirit.”

Thought Questions:

- 1 How is walking in the Spirit different from walking in the flesh?
- 2 What does life in the Spirit look like in practical terms?
- 3 How does life in the Spirit help us to avoid the pitfalls of both formalism and fanaticism?
- 4 Why are the gifts of the Holy Spirit so important for witness and service? Why can we expect a full manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit, just before the coming of Jesus, in those people who reveal the fruit of the Spirit?

► **STEP 4**—Create

Activity: Ask your class members to share one of their favorite family Christmas or birthday memories. As they think back on the positive memories of their lives, ask them to share why these times were so special. What is more important from an adult's perspective: the special experience or the gifts received? Point out that children seek gifts but adults seek relationships. Mature Christians seek to know Jesus intimately. Their relationship with Him is vital. They are willing to allow Him to work through them in the ways that He sees best. They seek to live godly, obedient lives, and to let Him impart the gifts that will best equip them to serve Him. They recognize that the fruit of the Spirit is the hallmark of genuine revival.