
Mystery

Part 3 – Manifestations

Sometimes in His presence we find a controversy within ourselves, His presence can make us restless. Our imperfect thoughts and assumptions are challenged by His truth. Our false expectations are dashed by His different ways or unpredictable plans. The presence of the Holy Spirit at work can be disorientating and can even cause offense.

Is God Safe?

The Holy Spirit doesn't come to endorse the status quo of our lives! When He comes, He often re-arranges circumstances, relationships and even our own hearts.

God's ways may not always feel safe to us, particularly if they challenge our preferences. It's in these times we must rely on our knowledge that because God is good, we can trust Him.

Word and Spirit

Can I trust the Spirit like I trust the Bible?

The Holy Spirit to whom we should be open is the author of the Bible – His Word. God gave us His Word and He will not lead us in any way that is contrary to what He has written.

If you are not open to the Spirit, you will never experience the same things that are described in His Word.

Being open to the Spirit is being vulnerable to Him immediately and directly.

Being open to the Word directly is to be open to the Spirit indirectly – as the Spirit applies that word.

Manifestations

The offence of the Holy Spirit is His very presence – His manifestations.

When a person is offended by the Spirit it is because they are offended by God. It is not possible to find God pleasant but to find the Holy Spirit offensive.

The manifestations of the Holy Spirit are most clearly seen both in the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23) and the gifts of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:11–16; 1 Corinthians 12:1–31; Romans 12:6–8). It's in these mysterious presentations of God's work in and through our lives that people can sometimes find offence.

We must always remember to have a holy reverence of God and His majesty and holiness. However, that doesn't equate to quietness and sobriety or moderation – it equates to humility, dependence and hunger.

When the power of God intersects with fragility of the human body, there is often a physical representation of this experience. We don't want to stop the manifestations of the Holy Spirit upon someone, or to control them, but neither do we want to emphasise the manifestation.

John Wesley prayed, *“Lord send us revival without its defects but if this is not possible, send revival, defects and all.”*

We should never be so afraid of the counterfeit that we refuse to experience the genuine.

Diversity in Unity

The church is an eclectic mix of people called to be in unity whilst pursuing God's presence. (Ephesians 4:1–3)

Not every family member is the same, but we share DNA – the presence of God's Spirit.

The history of the church reveals that during times of change, keeping unity is a hard task. We like churches that are homogeneous, but the kingdom is NOT homogeneous.

Discernment vs Judgement

Discernment allows us to work out what's at play BUT be careful – it's easy to move from discernment – testing all things and holding on to what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21) and slip into judgement.

Judgment is when you take the assessment of someone else and attribute value to them, yourself or others accordingly. We usually judge others by their actions and ourselves by our intentions.

You Can Trust God

Are we willing to pray, "Lord, if this is you, I want more. I am willing to let You take anything from me, and to receive anything You want to give me."

God will only send what is for our good and His glory (Luke 11:11-13).

We must be a church that continues to humble ourselves, seek the face of God and look to the power of the Spirit. Many things in the kingdom are available but not everything is automatic. We have to position ourselves to receive that which God wants to give to us.

When we stand in judgement of one another we are not positioning ourselves to receive what God wants to give and it stops us desiring God and a move of His Holy Spirit amongst us

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think it means to say that God isn't safe but He is good?
2. How has your background influenced how you see the work of the Holy Spirit?
3. Why is it that the Holy Spirit's manifestations are offensive to some? What manifestation of the Spirit would you find difficult to handle if God were to sovereignly move through you?
4. Read Ephesians 4:1-3 again. Reflect upon the following question – Where is it that you need to be making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit?
5. What is the difference between discernment and judgement? What are some of the effects of both?
6. God often works in ways that challenge us. This often strikes at our trust of God and His ways. Spend some time alone asking the Lord about this. If willing, pray this prayer to God; *"Lord, I am willing to let You take anything from me, and to receive anything You want to give me."*