

CHIEF MINISTRIES

December 2018

As we close out this year, I want to express to you how important it is going to be to you in the coming year of being open to the Holy Spirit. David's success and usefulness was the Holy Spirit. He was full of the Holy Spirit in power from the moment Samuel anointed him, but he had a journey to embark on. Psalm 51 is a reminder that man will not be perfect, although it must be our prayer day and night that you and I will be kept from the sin that lay behind that Psalm. (2 Samuel 12:1-14).

*"Do not cast me from your presence or take Your Holy Spirit from me.
Return to me the joy of your salvation, and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me" (v 11-12).*

"Grant me a willing spirit", a clear indication of his openness to the Spirit. David did not want to miss anything that could be of God. A willing spirit, what he went on to call a "*broken spirit*" (v17) is required if our anointing is to be useful to God.

I need to spell out, first, one of the differences between being open to the Word and being open to the Spirit. Openness to the Word is but to be open to the Spirit indirectly. This is because the Word – to which we must remain open – is powerful to us only when it is applied by the Spirit

I am a recent graduate of the Therapon Institute Theological Seminary here on the Eastham Unit. There were several graduates as there have been in the past. Many have gotten out and are continuing the combined work of the Word and the Spirit in their lives. Many of us still here behind the walls are involved in ministry walking out the Word by walking in the Spirit (applying the Word). There are those who have learned the Word, but not let the Spirit apply it to their lives and are walking around just as lost as ever, some even on their way back to the penitentiary. If the gospel is not applied by the Spirit, nobody will be saved. This is sound theology. It is also a sound doctrine of the Spirit.

But that is not the whole story, for there is more. 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 the Word. But being open to the Spirit is when He manifests Himself in an immediate and direct manner.

Some of us find it easier to be open to the Word than to the Holy Spirit. We feel safe with the Word but fearful that the Holy Spirit might lead us out of our comfort zone. But the Holy Spirit, to whom we should be open to, is the Author of the Bible, and He will not lead us in any way that is contrary to what He has written through His sovereign instruments. We are as safe with the Spirit as we are with the Word. And yet if we are not open to the Spirit, we will likely never experience some of the very things described in the Word.

A lot has to do with our background, culture and temperament when it comes to this matter of openness. The older Christian who is a bit intellectual, middle-class or from a church that is more theological in emphasis may gravitate toward the types of church service that will center on a solid Bible Study. The Christian, whether young or old, who may not be very intellectual by nature or middle class is sometimes seen to be more open to the Spirit – and it may have nothing to do with one's spirituality. There are people who would rather watch television than read a book before they became Christians. Conversion does not make a person like that intellectual any more than it will give a person a middle-class perspective. There are exceptions, of course; God can overrule anyone's temperament and background and revolutionize his or her intellectual interests. But it is unwise to ignore one's upbringing before conversion.

Those who are more open to the Word than the Spirit, then, are not necessarily more godly, just as those who are more open to the Spirit are not necessarily more godly.

I should hope, that those who by nature are more open to the Spirit would accept the need for discipline and the need for the Word – likewise – I would hope that those more open to accept the Word would see that they are no better off held captive to an intellectual approach to the Bible – and closing their minds and hearts to the Spirit.

Why are some people afraid of the Holy Spirit? Because the stigma of the Holy Spirit is His very presence. In other words, the stigma of the Spirit is the Spirit Himself. He by nature offends; all that is offensive that the Father and the Son is embodied in the person of the Holy Spirit.

There is a stigma to each person of the Trinity. The offense of the Father is His prerogative – His right to do and say what He pleases. He is sovereign. He does what He does after the Council of His own will. *“In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will.”* (Ephesians 1:11). *“For he says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”* (Romans 9:15, Exodus 33:19).

Said the psalmist, *“Our God is in heaven; He does whatever pleases Him.”* (Psalm 115:3).

This aspect of God offends.

Have you prayed for someone and they weren't healed? We may blame our insufficient faith. But faith is God's gift. God can give or withhold faith and be just either way. We cannot make God do anything. He has a will of His own. The prayer God answers is the one that conforms to His will, (1 John 5:14), and twisting His arm doesn't change what He wills. God is sovereign. He is able to heal – make no mistake about that – but He reserves the right to determine when He manifests His glory by healing. We all have to die sooner or later. Sometimes God has greater need for His children in heaven. We must allow God to have His pleasure in matters even though we ourselves are disappointed.

The stigma of the Father is His own sovereign will. We must accept this truth about Him and bow to Him. *“Unless the Lord builds the house, it's builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain.”* (Psalms 127:1).

The stigma of the Son is His provision – His death on the cross being the only way we can be saved. It is by Jesus' blood, more precious than anything in the history of the world. The same person who was accredited by God by signs, wonders and miracles was equally handed over to the wicked men, *“by God's set purpose and foreknowledge”* (Acts 2:23). God raised Jesus from the dead and made Him *“both Lord and Christ”* (v. 36). The result: *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12). We are saved by what Christ did as long as it is joined by *“faith in His blood”* (Romans 3:25). This is why Jesus Himself announced before His death, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* (John 14:6).

The offense of the cross consists both in the way we are saved and that it is only through God's Son. That is the offense. This means all men and women are lost until they hear and receive the gospel. This means they must hear the gospel before they can receive it. “How then can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? (Romans 10:14). Signs, wonders and miracles continued after Jesus went to heaven. They are continuing today. The lame man who was healed gave Peter a platform to proclaim the gospel.

And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: “Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? ^{v13}The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. ^{v14} But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ^{v15} and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. ^{v16} And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all. (Acts 3:12-16 ESV).

I pray for signs and wonders in the church but I believe the gospel message will be the center of any such movement of the Holy Spirit.

Each person of the Trinity, then, has its own stigma. And the stigma of the Spirit is His presence. The Holy Spirit offends. When one is offended by the Spirit, it is because he is offended by God. It is not possible to find God pleasant and to find the Holy Spirit offensive. You can't affirm all that Jesus Christ was and did, then turn around and reject the Holy Spirit. The persons of the Godhead are united. Equal, each has its own stigma. The Holy Spirit mirrors the other persons of the Godhead; therefore, how we respond to the person of the Spirit may show what we really feel about either the Father or the Son.

But since the Spirit can be offensive, why should we be open to Him? Are we not foolish or irrational if we deliberately open ourselves to one who is offensive and who offends? Answer: We must affirm God as He is; the Holy Spirit is God. When our hearts are truly right with God, we will find that God is not offensive at all! We will instead find Him glorious! But we must take God as He is and be prepared to affirm the presence of the Holy Spirit – however God may sovereignly choose to reveal Himself.

I believe there are those who are more open to the Word than the Spirit based on these evidences:

- Some Christians today believe that the only prophetic Word today comes through preaching. Some even say that the gift of prophecy in 1 Corinthians 12:10 is preaching – nothing more. They are comfortable, therefore, when the preached Word is applied by the Spirit and they are gripped. But they are uneasy with a person giving a prophetic word of knowledge.
- Some Christians are enamored with the gospel but fearful concerning manifestations of the Spirit – whether tongues, prophecy, falling down or laughing. They love the gospel with all their heart and would die for it. But they are unhappy should there be anything that might suggest that manifestations are also from the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Some Christians are all about the manifesting of the fruit of the Spirit but have minimal interest in the gifts of the Spirit. They believe that to show love, joy and peace is more honoring to God than speaking in tongues. They have 1 Corinthians to prove it! After all, Paul called love the most excellent way and clearly put the gift in proper perspective.
- Some love doctrine, teaching and whatever stimulates the intellect that are suspicious of experience. They point out that Paul appealed to the mind and that any theology worth its salt requires that we grasp the content of the gospel. Going by feelings and emotions is giving into the flesh and doesn't require discipline.
- Some are not excited by public worship unless it focuses on the old hymns - at least 100 years old. A modern hymn or gospel song caters more to feeling than a sense of God's majesty. They believe real worship is done best during one's quiet time; they come to church to praise God through hymns but mainly for preaching and teaching. They are quite put off by praying in small groups.
- Some are convinced that having the Word is to have the Spirit in equal measure as well; therefore any emphasis on the Spirit implies they don't already have the Spirit. They are so sure that we have all we need of the Spirit already, since every Christian has the Holy Spirit. Not only is further openness to the Spirit redundant but also it does not dignify the Spirit we have.
- Some Christians believe that any openness to the Spirit is opening oneself to what is not the Holy Spirit at all. Since all Christians love the Spirit, it is dangerous to look beyond what God has already done in Christ. Otherwise we invite the flesh to take over, the worst case scenario being that the devil and the occult move in.

There, then, are some of the indications one is not very open to the Holy Spirit. A theological rationale lies behind most of this. But we must not forget temperament and background. And if one is by nature quite cerebral and intellectual, there is genuine fear of letting any part of us that is not strictly the mind be involved.

I would like to make the case that one be open to the Holy Spirit, that is, looking for more of the Holy Spirit. I too am intellectual, but I've also let the Holy Spirit hem me in and refine me, I still am. My background has paved the way to be open, but I too am cautious. True, every Christian has the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9). Moreover, we do not "lack any spiritual gift" (1 Corinthians 1:7). Indeed, we have been blessed "with every spiritual blessing in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). But to the Corinthians Paul said; "Eagerly desire the greater gifts" (1 Corinthians 12:31), which shows that his earlier word in 1 Corinthians 1:7 did not mean we have everything available already in an absolute

sense. And Paul hoped that the Ephesians would be “*filled with the Spirit*” (*Ephesians 5:18*) which must surely mean they might not be - even though we are already blessed with every spiritual blessing!

What is openness to the Spirit?

- It is humility – the recognition that I don’t have everything and that I don’t know everything. It is the awareness that I need more of the Holy Spirit
- It is the conscious desire to find God wherever He is, to recognize Him as soon He appears and to miss nothing that could be received of Him.
- It is knowing that God is willing to give me so much more as long as I admit my poverty as opposed to saying “*I... Do not need a thing*” (*Revelation 3:17*). It is one thing for the Holy Spirit to open our hearts to our understanding, it is another for us to be open to Him instead of challenging Him to open us first. Admittedly, we must be changed by God Himself (by His sovereign power) before we are going to listen and obey. But is there not a case for our remaining open to the same Holy Spirit, having been converted, so that we miss nothing He would say to us? Answer: yes!

The underlying problem of the Hebrew Christians, to whom the book of Hebrews is addressed, was that they had become “*dull of hearing*” (*Hebrews 5:11*). This means they had become closed to the point of not even being able to hear God anymore. They felt no need to be open.

The only link between us and the throne of grace is the Holy Spirit. If He is quenched or grieved, we have cut off the only link that will let us know how God is moving today. We must therefore maintain the best possible relationship with the Spirit. Although God is the same yesterday, today and forever, and therefore unchanging in His nature, he does not always reveal Himself in one generation as He did in another. We must therefore be open to the Spirit lest we miss the way in which God sovereignly chooses to manifest His glory.

If we are closed (our minds fully made up) to whatever God may wish to do or say today, we will miss His glory, just as Israel missed recognizing the Messiah when He appeared. You could never have convinced the scribes, the priests or the Pharisees that God’s chosen Messiah would appear before their eyes - and they not see Him! But this is what happened! If we truly are open to the Holy Spirit (because we are prepared to pay the price and go with whatever the stigma may be), there is probably more likelihood that we will not miss His glory when it is unveiled.

Every generation has its stigma by which the believer’s faith is tested. It is not so difficult to believe what God did yesterday. But what God did yesterday was highly offensive at the time. I was saved at the Brownsville revival in Pensacola, Florida during the revival that 20/20, Time, Newsweek, Rolling Stone, SPIN, Nightline, did their stories on. Somewhere between 4-5 million people from over 70 countries visited this church. Miracles were the norm. Repentance was a daily occurrence in the thousands. It was a phenomenon from Father’s Day 1995 until around 2002. I was blessed to be a part of the worship that came out of the revival, even to write some songs that are still being sung today. I embraced it and it changed my life. I told God in ‘97 that I would go to the deepest jungle or to the worst prison in America for Him. He knows my heart even better than I do! I didn’t foresee the way in which I would honor that call, but He did, and He took me up on it. Coming to prison as an inmate was not even a remote thought by myself, but let me tell you gentlemen, the price we will have to pay for the anointing really is beyond our thought process. But if you are willing to be that open to the Holy Spirit in your life, He’ll use you in ways you never dreamed in places you never planned. I’ve been more successful as a worship leader, pastor, prophet, teacher and evangelist than I’ve ever believed possible. Just by example alone wherever I’ve been. God has been faithful and I give Him all the glory! What God was doing at Brownsville Assembly was highly offensive to many. Hank Hanegraff, known as the “Bible Answer Man” on the radio at the time, even wrote a book about it called “Counterfeit Revival”. John MacArthur wrote a book called “Strange Fire”. I’m sure both of these men have done wonderful things for the kingdom of God. Interestingly enough, Hank visited the revival John MacArthur never did. Hank has renounced his Baptist upbringing and now claims the Orthodox religion as “what is the oldest only true religion - according to him. And I must say it takes a lot of shameless audacity to put one’s name on the Holy Bible just because you added your opinion to it and call them study notes. I’m just sayin.... We may say, “I wouldn’t have objected to what God was doing had I been alive then.” But, the only proof that we would have accepted what God did in a previous generation is affirming what God is doing in ours. Even the Pharisees felt themselves very pious because they affirmed yesterday’s man! Jesus confronted them on this very issue. “*And you say, if we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.*” (*Matthew 23:30*).

But they were committing the equivalent offense - rejecting Jesus Christ Himself - in their own day. Jesus said to them, *“So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!”* (v 31, 32).

It is sometimes said that the good is the enemy of the best. A church that is reasonably prosperous doesn't want revival. Revival is messy. I know that there are current chaplains that would quit before they let God take control of their going – through – the – motions services. One day we will be held into account of what we did and didn't do.

The offense in what God is doing in the present is almost always changed sufficiently from what He did previously in order to test one's love of God and true openness to the Spirit. Not a single person listed in Hebrews 11 had the luxury of stepping into the stigma created by yesterday's man or woman of faith. All those described in Hebrews 11 were faced with a new and unprecedented stigma in their own generation. You may ask, “How can I know I would qualify for a place in Hebrews 11 had I been living in ancient times?” I answer: If you embrace today's stigma, you would have embraced whatever stigma there was in a previous day. You may say, “I could never die like the martyrs of old.” I would answer, “You would if you show today that you bear the stigma God puts before you.” And think of this: think of the stigma that comes with coming to prison, whether we should be here or not. We are the outcasts, the sex offenders, the murderers, the thieves, the liars, the cons. Only God can change that! But you have to apply His Holy Spirit to your lives or you've just got a bunch of intellectualism. You reading this right now know whether or not you've really allowed God to change you beyond your intellect. People change their minds every day. Are you allowing Him, His Spirit to change your heart? *“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little also will be dishonest with much.”* (Luke 16:10).

Why be open to the Holy Spirit? Because God still speaks today. *“Today, if you hear His voice”* (Psalm 95:7). But did this refer to the Holy Spirit? Yes!

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear his voice, ^{v8} do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, ^{v9} where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. ^{v10} Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.’ ^{v11} As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest.’” (Hebrews 3:7-11).

Some will say, “Surely the Bible is the infallible, inerrant and unchanging Word of God, and this was given yesterday.”

I answer: “God's Word by the Holy Spirit – is infallible, inerrant and unchanging. And God gave us the Bible yesterday. But the Holy Spirit applies it today. And if we are open to the immediate and direct witness of the Spirit, the Bible will be doubly real to us.”

The application of God's Word by the Holy Spirit will be to focus on an aspect of that Word that will be the offense of today. The Holy Spirit continues to speak, - clearly, directly and immediately through prophecy, word of knowledge, visions and audible voice. But He will never, never, never conflict with or contradict anything in the Bible - He will only make it clearer!

What is openness to the Spirit? How may we know we are open, open in our hearts as well as our heads? It was Lydia's heart that the Lord opened (Acts 16:14). It is possible to be theoretically open (open in theory - that is, we give intellectual assent) but closed in our hearts. Why would we be open in the head and not the heart?

The chief impediment to openness to the Spirit is fear. *“For God did not give us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline”* (2 Timothy 1:7). We must become vulnerable: able to be hurt, unprotected against attacks. Becoming vulnerable means that we are willing to be hurt – or embarrassed. We must cease protecting ourselves with things such as defense mechanisms (setting up defenses in our own minds) or excuses for not being involved or worrying about our reputation with friends - even closest friends.

We must learn to be extremely sensitive to the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a person that can be grieved or quenched (Ephesians 4:30, 1 Thessalonians 5:19). We grieve Him chiefly by bitterness - having an unforgiving spirit (which is

why we slander people). We quench the spirit chiefly by protecting ourselves from vulnerability or speaking against what God is presently doing, supposing God couldn't be doing that ! When the spirit is unquenched and in us in large measure, which means we cultivate our relationship with Him by giving Him time and walking in the light (1 John 1:7), we will go with the Spirit's flow. We will feel it when we are displeasing Him. We will recognize what He is doing and saying.

I say extremely sensitive. How much more should our own anointing increase so that we are much, much more sensitive to the Spirit's ways than we would have been years ago. I simply don't want to miss anything God is in; this is why I would make the case that we be extremely sensitive to the Spirit. The Spirit is easily grieved. Only a high level of sensitivity to the Spirit will recognize the Spirit: in a Word that is preached, in the prophetic Word, in various manifestations, in public worship.

How can we become open if we fear we are not open but want to be open?

- Be sure there is no unconfessed sin in your life (1 John 1:9).
- Be sure there is no bitterness or grudge against anyone (Ephesians 4:31).
- Be sure you do not speak against anyone (James 3).
- Be sure you have a life of solid prayer and Bible reading (Luke 10:1, 2 Timothy 2:15).
- Walk in all the light God gives you (1 John 1:7).
- Learn to know the Spirit's voice (Hebrews 3:7-8).
- Develop a familiarity with His ways and the ability to recognize His presence (Hebrews 3:10, 11).

Do not assume that you are open to the Spirit today just because you may have been yesterday. I know the feeling of having gone through a hard time, all because I had been open to the Spirit, and saying to myself afterwards, "I'm not going through anything like that again." But God would not let me have no such luxury for long.

Do not assume you are open because you have taken a strong stand on some issues such as abortion, inspiration of Scripture or sound teaching and still could not necessarily be open to the spirit. You could even have the gifts of the Spirit and not be open; after all, they are irrevocable (Romans 11:29).

Do not assume that you are open to the Spirit because God is blessing you. You may be prospering. You may have been healed. You may have a good job. You may know God's guidance.

The consequence of not being open is horrendous; it could mean that you cannot enter God's rest (Hebrews 3:7-11). Or that God has sworn an oath against you (Hebrews 3:11). It could mean you cannot hear Him speak again (Hebrews 5:11) or that you cannot be renewed again to repentance (Hebrews 6:4-6).

But if we are open to the Spirit and able to recognize Him at work, we will be at peace with ourselves. We are not likely to miss what He is doing.

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:17, 18).

Be Open, Be Transformed, Be Free!

Be.....

Chief

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Christ's

Heart

In

Every

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