

Beware of the Visible

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Jesus said, “And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” (Mk. 16:17-18)

There are those who set great stock on these verses – and they are indeed precious promises. But they are not the whole counsel of God. Some Bible scholars even question the authenticity of this portion because of their absence from certain ancient and (debatably) “better” manuscripts. At the least, however, there are other passages and ideas that we need to consider as well.

Consider the list of activities here – deliverance from the demonic, spiritual gifts, physical dangers and healings. These are only *four* things listed here. Paul, on the other hand, tells us that one Spirit administers *all* the gifts for the edification of all. (1 Cor. 12:4-7) Scholars list the giftings of the Spirit in various ways – some as many as 70! - but there are certainly more than four in any way we count them.

We must consider also John’s warning – “everything in the world - the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does - comes not from the Father but from the world.” (1 Jn. 2:16) – and remember that the “church” in which we were raised and from which we have fled was almost only about these very visible things.

- If we wanted better teachings, livelier singing, softer singing, better children’s “ministry,” whatever, we could find it at any given “church.” But this is only the cravings of the flesh nature and not the leading of the Spirit of God.
- If we wanted to see more people coming in the doors every week, if we wanted more people involved in various “ministries,” if we wanted to measure the results of our work *for* God, we can do that at “church” easily enough. But this is only the lust of the eyes.
- If we wanted to feel better about ourselves, at “church” we can simply look around at all those “good people” and feel good about being one of their number (before we were “saved,” though, we were sure they were hypocrites – by now we should know we were right then!) or we can count the hours we spend at various “services” or in doing our favorite “ministry.” But this is only the boasting of what we have and do (“the pride of life” in other translations).

Even though we have left the “church,” we can easily carry much of this leftover baggage with us and wonder why God doesn’t move in our midst.

When we learn to simply sit back and ask the Lord to instruct us and lead us in our every day daily lives, we find that much of the demand for visible results is replaced by spiritual understanding. Deliverance, for example, can be accomplished by casting out *in some cases*, certainly. But sometimes only when the “ground” (the lie upon which the demonic is perched within our hearts or souls) is removed – that is, when truth replaces a false belief – do we see true

and permanent deliverance. The casting out can be done in a moment – it is a very visible thing.

But it can be only a temporary relief that results in greater bondage than if the demon were not cast out at this time. (Mt. 12:43-45) When we abide (live in, remain, stay, reside) in the truth of Christ's teachings, we shall know the truth and the *truth* - the Lord Jesus Christ Himself (Jn. 14:6) – will set us free. (Jn. 8:31-32) This latter can be a lengthy *process*, a virtually “invisible,” certainly not well publicized, period of standing with, counseling and encouraging the one under the power of the demonic before the “ground” is removed out from under the demonic's “feet.”

Consider also healings. There are many dogmatic teachings about healings these days. Some say Jesus doesn't heal at all, some say He always heals and some say He sometimes heals. Some go on to make dogmatic laws that *no one* who claims to be a believer in Christ should ever go to a doctor. If this is a personal instruction from the Spirit of the Lord to a particular individual for reasons perhaps even only God understands, that is one matter – those who go on from this personal instruction to concoct a law for all believers at all times have stepped into another realm entirely.

Christ came and died to abolish laws and ordinances (Eph. 2:15) – He does not intend that we should replace the ones He removed with inventions of our own! God knows that some need to actually go to the doctor before they can believe in what He can do. Some doctors need to see that Christ does still heal. Some people need to limp (or perhaps even remain in bed!) the rest of their days so that they don't spiritually walk away from the Lord and these may never be healed at all but might need a doctor to confirm a diagnosis or to control pain. Yes, we can fall into bondage to drugs (Greek, *pharmakeia* [5331] – Rev. 9:21) but where is our spiritual liberty (to be led in and *through* all things by the Spirit of truth) under this “no doctors” *law* that is not even once clearly stated in the Scriptures? Consider also Paul's “thorn in the flesh” here. (2 Cor. 12:7) If the Lord has told *you* not to see a doctor, that's fine – but bear with your brother who was not in on that meeting between you and God! Can not *God* tell our brothers this if *He* thinks they should not visit a doctor? How *small* is our God that we must make laws over one another *for* Him?

Again, let us look at this through the prism of the visible results that religious flesh craves. Does Christ always heal? Even when He was here He did not always heal everyone – the man at the pool of Bethesda was the *only* one recorded as getting healed that day even though there was “a great multitude of sick people” there. (Jn. 5:3, 9)

In the face of saying that Jesus always heals everyone, we need to recall Paul's warning: “The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan; with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.” (2 Ths. 2:9-10) If all we demand is visible signs and tangible proofs of “God's” power, Satan will be happy to give us those. After all, he (whether this is himself or his ruler, the epitome of himself, is immaterial to the point being made here) “exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.” (2 Ths. 2:4) If we are not careful to discern the *source* of the miracles we experience and witness, we are begging to be deceived. If all we want is power – and not God Himself – God will give us over to the strong delusion that we really are having the signs and wonders of God following us. (2 Ths. 2:11)

We can no longer play “church” – that is rely on “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 Jn. 2:16) – and hope to worship God in *spirit* and in *truth*. (Jn. 4:24) There simply is no fellowship, no commonality, no partnership between righteousness (what is

right in God's eyes) and lawlessness (what is *right* in a man's own eyes – 2 Cor. 6:14) Though almost all of us have learned “how to do” religion on the basis of what we feel and see and can boast about, this has nothing to do with the true way of the Lord. The true way of the Lord is that which is right in *His* eyes, not our own.

And if we are not delivered out of every danger (like snakes and poisons), that is, as it will be when God gives the saints over to Satan's end-time government to be overcome and killed (Rev. 12:11, 13:7), will this visible “contradiction” to the promises Jesus made (about the signs following the believer) shake our faith? It certainly can if we prefer the unrighteousness of visible signs rather than the righteous judgments that can only be made by the right dividing of the word of truth, an activity possible to finite man only by the assistance of the Holy Spirit of truth. (see 2 Ths. 2:12, Jn. 7:24, 2 Tim. 2:15)

Consider also the bishop. Prior to 150 A.D., there was *not* a bishop standing over the local assemblies in every city of the Roman empire. It was Ignatius of Antioch (died. c. 110 A.D.) who first wrote the notion that the bishop rightly stood “in the place of God” over the assemblies. Ignatius is simply the first historically recorded Nicolaitan. (Rev. 2:6, 15) The first-century followers of Christ, because they feared the fracturing that was occurring in the arguments between the arising bishops (see Acts 20:30) and because persecution was coming from the Roman empire, they *felt* and *feared* that they needed a visible representative of Christ to stand over them and tell them what God was saying to them. Like Peter fearing the wind and the waves, the first-century believers took their eyes off of Christ and began to sink. (see Mt. 14:29-31) The fading away of the miraculous powers that accompany the outpouring of the Spirit of Christ coincide *exactly* with the appearance of the visible bishop standing in the place of God over the local assemblies. If we trade the “church” bishop (“pastor”) for a house “church” Nicolaitan “teacher” or allow ourselves to come underneath some Nicolaitan “pastor” in any way, we will only come under the power of the strong delusion from a different direction.

As the end of days comes upon this world, we will see the genuine signs and wonders Jesus spoke of. But we will also see the lying signs and wonders Paul warned of as well. It is the wise man who takes a position of neutrality and suspends judgment on the source of any miracle until he sees the fruit it produces in the life of the recipient. If a visible healing results in a man being able to walk back into the bars or back into “church” and be quite comfortable there, we must question the source. If a visible deliverance results in “freedom” from one sin only to be replaced by a greater bondage to a more subtle sin, we can know this is not the Lord's work. If we are delivered from a visible danger only so that we may continue our life as seems best in our own eyes and not live according to the commands of our King (2 Cor. 5:15), we can know we have been deceived. If we operate in a “spiritual gift” that puffs us up and does not bring glory to Christ, we can know we are partaking of the power of deceiving spirits. If we fail to receive a healing or a deliverance from danger or we don't operate in some visible expression of someone's idea of “spiritual gifts” but yet we are faithful to what God has placed before us to do and be as we overcome sin and self and the world and even Satan's minions, we can know that we are walking in the power of God. This alone *is* the way of the Lord – and it is not always readily visible to our eyes – and we do well not to let our lives get any more complicated than the simple way of following Christ in spirit and truth. (2 Cor. 11:3-4)

Let he who has ears hear.

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