

I. Physical Manifestations of the Holy Spirit

- A. When we talk about manifestations of the Holy Spirit most people immediately think of physical manifestations that commonly accompany seasons of revival or powerful corporate gatherings. There is much debate and opinion concerning these unique manifestations and many are at a loss for scriptural clarity concerning them.
- B. We are not alone in our struggle over these unique, unusual manifestations caused by the Spirit's presence have been documented in virtually every part of the world within the Body of Christ. Christians from every tradition have written extensively about these types of manifestations for centuries and the sheer weight of material is overwhelming, books could be written just summarizing the material.
 - 1. The debate almost always revolves around the confusion of what is God and what is not, and how to know the difference. I believe this is why Paul started out his instructions concerning the work of the Holy Spirit in the corporate body by addressing this debate. (1 Cor. 12:1-3)

II. Historical precedent for the manifestations of the Spirit

- A. Many of us have seen these types of manifestations throughout our lives at various times or in various seasons. For most of us these times and seasons can be counted on one or two hands. However, during the 1st and 2nd great awakenings we find church leaders who saw and experienced these types of manifestations for over 50 years.
 - 1. The First Great Awakening – Refers to a season of revival and awakening that spanned from 1730 – 1755 in Britain and it's 13 colonies in North America. This revival made permanent impact on the understanding and expression of Christianity on the earth. The major leaders of this time period were George Whitfield, Jonathan Edwards, and John Wesley.
 - 2. The Second Great Awakening – A second great wave of salvation, and revival swept the United States from 1790 – 1860 hundreds of thousands encountered Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit as entire regions in the US would experience transformation. This movement resulted in vast numbers of converts and social justice movements. Leaders of this movement Charles Finney, Lyman Beecher, Barton Stone, Peter Cartwright, and Francis Asbury.

- B. We must imagine a scene where there is no worldwide media network, no worship teams, no microphones, and no charismatic culture. The leaders in these seasons of revival had no grid for the gifts and manifestations of the Holy Spirit and at the onset of were offended and opposed to such things.

III. The First Great Awakening

- A. John Wesley (1703-1791), the founder of the Methodist movement began to preach in England in the mid-1730s and bizarre and unexplainable physical manifestations began to happen. These manifestations were scorned by himself and his fellow leaders and friends as they were considered to be irreverent, disruptive, inappropriate and carnal. The following excerpts are from his personal journal:

“People dropped on every side as thunderstruck as they fell to the ground, others with convulsions exceeding all description and many reported seeing visions. Some shook like a cloth in the wind, others roared and screamed or fell down with involuntary laughter.”

“We then called upon God to confirm his word. Immediately one that stood by and to our no small surprise cried out aloud, with the utmost vehemence, even as in the agonies of death. But we continued in prayer, and a seemingly new song was put in our mouth...Soon after, two other persons were seized with strong pain, and constrained to ‘roar for the disquietness of their heart. But it was not long before they likewise burst forth into praise to God their Savior. Signs and wonders are even now wrought by his holy servant Jesus.”

“About sixty of our brethren until three in the morning, the power of God came mightily on us, insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground.”

1. This became such a common occurrence at his meetings that Wesley eventually came to the conclusion that he would either have to accept these manifestations and learn to steward them, or he would have to stop his meetings.

“Lord send us revival without its defects but if this is not possible, send revival, defects and all.” – John Wesley Jan. 1st 1739

- B. George Whitefield (1714-1770), would open air preach to sometimes up to 50,000 people in America and England. It is recorded that he preached over 20,000 times to over 10 million individuals during his time in ministry. When people started to fall in Wesley's meetings, Whitefield protested it in a letter to Wesley.

“I cannot think it right in the sight of God and our reverence to Him that you to give so much encouragement to these convulsions which people have.”

2. Ironically enough, when Whitefield confronted Wesley he found himself reprimanded by reality. When Whitefield preached the next day, the same manifestations in which He condemned started happening in his meetings. From that time on his preaching was commonly accompanied by physical manifestations. His journal entry from that day and the years following are similar to that of Wesley.

“Four persons sunk down close to him, almost in the same moment. One of them lay without sense or motion. A second trembled exceedingly. The third had strong convulsions all over his body, but made no noise, unless by groans. The fourth, equally convulsed, called upon God, with strong cries and tears.”

“Many falling to the ground, trembling exceedingly with strong convulsions. People fell down, cried out, trembled with convulsive twitchings. Sinners dropped down, shrieking, groaning, crying for mercy, convulsed, agonizing, fainting, falling down in distress or in raptures of joy! The noise was like a roar of Niagara. The vast sea of human beings as agitated by a storm. Seized with convulsive jerking all over.”

3. Wesley wrote back to Whitefield:

“I trust we shall all suffer God to carry on His own work in a way that pleases Him. A true work of God without stumbling blocks is never to be expected.”

- C. Jonathan Edwards (1703 –1758) The great leader of the First Awakening in the 1730s and 1740s in New England, is considered to be one of America’s greatest theologians. He became the chief spokesperson for the revival, trying to bridge the difficult gap of understanding of emotional excess and freedom of the Spirit as evidenced with manifestations. He provided a comprehensive biblical evaluation of revival and its manifestations in his book “A Narrative of Surprising Conversations and the Great Awakening”. The following are excerpts from that work:

“Many people appeared to be overcome with the greatness of divine things and many others at the same time were overcome with distress about their sinful state so that the whole room was full of nothing but outcries, faintings and such like and many were overpowered and continued there for some hours. Some have been so overcome with a sense of the dying love of Christ as to weaken the body. It was a very frequent thing to see a house full of outcries, faintings, convulsions and such like, both with distress, and also with joy”

“It was common to see outcries, faintings, convulsions with distress and joy. Some were so affected that their bodies were overcome, so they stayed all night in the church. There were some instances of persons lying in a sort of trance, remaining for perhaps a whole twenty-four hours motionless, and with their senses locked up; but in the meantime under strong imagination, as though they went to heaven, and had there a vision of glorious and delightful objects”

Their joyful surprise has caused their hearts as it were to leap, so that they have been ready to break forth into laughter, tears often at the same time issuing like a flood, and intermingling a loud weeping. Sometimes they have not been able to forbear crying out with a loud voice, expressing their great admiration”

IV. The Second Great Awakening

- A. Charles Finney (1792-1875) is considered by many to be America’s most powerful revivalist. He is often credited as being the instrument to bring 500,000 conversions from 1825 to 1875. Finney described people falling under the power of God’s presence in his meetings.

“It was impossible to keep people from laughing, phenomena of speechlessness for hours, fainting spells.”

“The congregation began to fall from their seats in every direction. I was obliged to stop preaching.”

“An awful solemnity seemed to settle upon the people; the congregation began to fall from their seats in every direction and cry for mercy. If I had a sword in each hand, I could not have cut them down as fast as they fell. As had happened many times before I was obliged to stop preaching.”

- B. Francis Asbury, appointed by Wesley in 1771 as a missionary to the colonies, was a disciplined man who insisted on meetings being conducted in a proper fashion, yet his meetings were characterized by shouting, falling, crying, and “jerks.”

V. Five Distinguishing Marks of the Work of the Holy Spirit

- A. After 30 years of stewarding these types of meetings Johnathon Edwards along with his peers came to the conclusion that it is almost impossible to discern whether or not a physical manifestation is the result of overzealous enthusiasm of an individual or the work of the Holy Spirit. They called upon leadership to evaluate the manifestations by looking past the enthusiastic behavior and to fruit it bore in the days and weeks following the manifestation.

B. Edwards wrote of five distinguishing marks of the Spirit's work. He stated that Satan nor the enthused individual would not counterfeit activities that led to these responses.

1. Does the individual carry a desire to bring honor and glory to Jesus?
2. Does it produce a greater hatred of sin and a greater love for righteousness?
3. Does it produce a greater regard for Scripture?
4. Does it lead people into truth?
5. Does it produce a greater love for God and man?

VI. Gleaning from History

A. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899–1981), is considered by many to be one of the most influential voices in the Church in the 20th century, specifically, in the charismatic culture. For nearly 30 years he ministered at Westminster Chapel in London. He was a devout student of the historical events of the First and Second Great awakenings, along with the writings of its leaders. Lloyd-Jones pointed out that it comes nearer to being a rule of revival and renewal that unique manifestations occur. He concluded that these phenomena are not essential to radical transformation of regions or individuals but should be expected.

“Manifestations of the Spirit are not essential to revival yet it is true to say that, on the whole, they do tend to be present when there is a revival. Always in a revival there is what some call divine disorder. Some are groaning and agonizing under conviction, others praising God for the great salvation. And all this leads to crowded and prolonged meetings. Time seems to be forgotten. A meeting may not end until daybreak the next morning with nobody aware of the passing of the hours.”

“What helps us determine if a manifestation is the work of the Spirit is what results from it. It's not whether we fall down but rather what happens after we get up. Manifestations are not in themselves marks of spirituality, nor do they in themselves guarantee spiritual growth. The confirmation that a manifestation is of the Spirit is seen in the spiritual growth it brings.”