

FROM THE GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT

From time to time, the General Council receives inquiries desiring comment on various revivals or ministries held in both Assemblies of God and non-Assemblies of God churches.

Rather than attempting to comment on any specific series of meetings, I feel it would be preferable to provide some scriptural guidelines for assessment. I have great confidence in the maturity of Assemblies of God pastors and laity to make their own judgments and heed the admonition of the apostle Paul: "Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:19-22, NIV).

The Assemblies of God is irrevocably committed to the inspiration of Scripture, that the Bible provides the assessment tools needed for evaluating doctrine and experience, and is deeply hungry for the continued filling and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Our former general superintendent, Thomas F. Zimmerman, once compared the Holy Spirit to a mighty river, and the Scriptures to the banks of that river. Brother Zimmerman said that great harm occurs when the river overruns the banks, but that the river does great good when it stays within the banks.

Thus, it is well for us to look at the safeguards the Bible provides in helping us "test everything." Here are the questions we should always ask.

1. Is Jesus Christ exalted? The purpose of the Holy Spirit is to testify about Christ, and to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment to come (John 15:26; 16:8). To the Corinthian church that had become overly enamored with charismatic manifestations, the apostle Paul wrote "I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2).

Thus, the focus for any lasting revival always must be on Jesus. The Holy Spirit has not come to glorify himself, or any human or angelic

personality.

2. Is the Word of God proclaimed? Every revival with lasting effect has always been rooted in the preaching of God's Word. This is in keeping with the spread of the gospel in the early Church as recorded in Acts.
- Following the first persecution, they "spoke the word of God boldly" (4:31).
 - Following the second persecution and flogging, "day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ" (5:42).
 - After the selection of deacons, "the word of God spread" (6:7).
 - Resulting from Saul's persecution of the church, "those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went" (8:4).
 - Samaria "accepted the word of God" (8:14).
 - The Gentiles of Cornelius' household "received the word of God" (11:1).
 - Paul and Barnabas preached "the word of God" on their first missionary journey and "the word of the Lord spread through the whole region" (13:46,49).
 - Before departing for their second missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas and many others "taught and preached the word of the Lord" at Antioch (15:35).
 - The Holy Spirit kept Paul and Barnabas from "preaching the word in the province of Asia" (16:6).
 - The Bereans "received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (17:11); Paul "was preaching the word of God at Berea" (17:13).
 - At Corinth, "Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God" (18:11).
 - Through Paul's ministry at Ephesus, "all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord" (19:10).
 - Paul's farewell words to the Ephesian elders are: "For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God" (20:27).

It is clear from the above references that great focus was given in the early Church to preaching the Word, sometimes also identified as proclaiming the gospel. This is consistent with the first commitment of the early Church following the day of Pentecost: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' doctrine . . ." (Acts 2:42).

Thus, a doctrinal test for any revival is whether the content of the preaching is the same as Jesus and the Apostles. The Word of God stands over personal viewpoints. Any Biblical revival must "contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3). If so-called truth is being proclaimed that cannot be found in Scripture, then that proclamation violates the specific announcement of Scripture that the faith "was once for all entrusted" and such a proclamation also deviates from the apostles' fidelity to preach the Word, and from the early Church's devotion to the apostles' doctrine.

The Azusa Street Revival (1906-09) unabashedly proclaimed that the sure plumb line of truth was God's revealed and written Word. Elder Seymour and others were criticized sharply for their insistence on "checking everything out with the Word." But, they were unashamed. In fact, Seymour responded to these criticisms in the September 1907 issue of *The Apostolic Faith*.

"We are measuring everything by the Word, every experience must measure up with the Bible. Some say that is going too far, but if we have lived too close to the Word, we will settle that with the Lord when we meet Him in the air.

Miraculous manifestations are never the test of a true revival. Fidelity to God's Word is the test. Jesus himself said there would be many who would do miracles in His name and even cast out demons, but He does not know them (Matthew 7:15-23). Jesus warned that "many false prophets will appear and deceive many people" (Matthew 24:11). Paul warns, "If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing" (1 Timothy 6:3). To the Galatians, Paul writes: "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned (Galatians 1:8). Paul also warns: "Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow" (Colossians 2:18,19). Peter warns that "there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies. ...

Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up." (2 Peter 2:1-3).

In summary, the message must always be examined. If the message and the messenger line up with God's Word, then the revival is on safe biblical ground and it should and must be embraced. If not, then even though miracles and manifestations occur, it should be avoided.

This raises the question of how can healings and miracles occur if the message and/or messenger are not consistent with Scripture. The attribution for the healings and miracles is the grace of God and His mercy for hurting people.

3. Are persons repenting of sin and being baptized in water and the Holy Spirit? Repentance has been called the first word of the gospel because it is the initial response called for by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:2), Jesus (Matthew 4:17), the Twelve (Mark 6:12), Jesus after His resurrection (Luke 24:47), Peter (Acts 2:38), and Paul (Acts 26:20). With repentance comes baptism in water and the overwhelming or baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38,39).

Unless these initiatory events of the Christian life occur, along with the sanctifying work of the Spirit that leads to a holy life, then the miracles, crowds, and enthusiasm will quickly wane.

Of course, there are additional questions that can be raised, but my purpose is to give some starter reflections for those who have honest hearts to "test all things" as Paul admonished. If the above three questions cannot be answered with a resounding yes, then perhaps other questions are unnecessary.

The modern Pentecostal revival is now over 100 years old. Within that revival, there have been some significant centers of activity. For example, the Azusa Street Revival generated a missionary movement whose effects we still see today. The charismatic renewal brought refreshing both to Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal believers. However, there have also been some tornadoes that have brought destruction. In other words, there have been good winds and ill winds.

It is our responsibility to maintain a deep hunger for God and to keep our focus on the mission He has given us: to bring glory to God, to evangelize the lost, and to make disciples. We cannot do this on our own. We need the empowerment of the Holy Spirit along with the signs that follow those who believe.

Someone has said that revivals are like childbirth. They are messy, but you like the final result. Certainly, every revival has been marked by some elements that would be regarded as extreme. Dr. J. Edwin Orr, who studied and wrote more on the history of revivals than anyone else in Christian history, told me once that revivals are like a cabin on the Maine coast that has been shuttered up for the winter. When the winds begin to blow, the first thing that begins to make noise is all the loose hinges and shutters. And, that may well be the case. So we must be cautious at the initial onset of a revival to let some "loose hinges and shutters" have their freedom, but, ultimately, if the revival is to have enduring fruitfulness, it must be pastored carefully with doctrinal soundness, moral and financial accountability, and care to give publicity to Christ rather than to the revival.

The Azusa Street Revival had such enduring fruitfulness precisely because the three questions raised above can be well answered, both then and now: Christ was exalted, the Word of God was the plumb line, and people responded to the gospel with repentance and baptism in water and in the Spirit. And, like the early Church, they were full of the Holy Spirit and went everywhere to share the good news!

Let us keep the prayer of Habakkuk (3:2) in our hearts and on our lips:

Lord, I have heard of your fame;
I stand in awe of your deeds, O Lord.
Renew them in our day,
In our time make them known.

Your brother in Christ,
George O. Wood
with the concurrence of the Executive Presbytery of
The General Council of The Assemblies of God