

2009

Holy Spirit Endorsement

by Bill Lockwood

To lead those in religious error into the light of the gospel is not a simple task. Paul refers to this as “*opening their eyes*” (Acts 26:18). Outside of a predisposition to ignore the Scriptures, one of the more difficult obstacles to overcome in the heart is the unfounded belief that God has *directly* stamped His approval upon us by means of some *experience that we have been led to believe is the product of the Holy Spirit*. This is referred to by some as a “direct call” of God; by others as “direct illumination” or simply “being led by the Holy Spirit.” Be careful to note that it is an “experience” that is supposed to have been caused by direct Holy Spirit action. This “Holy Spirit Endorsement” is freighted with error.

First, the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit—one of the three persons of the Godhead—indeed influences us, but always and everywhere by means of the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). Christ said the Spirit would convict men of sin (John 16:7,8) but it would be by means of preaching the message. Christians are led by the Spirit (Romans 8:14) as they follow the word (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

Second, leaders in Christendom frequently utilize the ‘Endorsement of the Holy Spirit’ concept to undergird their own cause. If preachers today are “inspired by” the Holy Spirit, or “directly led” by God to preach a certain message that the “Holy Spirit has laid on their heart”—who am I to disagree? One might as well begin a sermon with “I have the imprimatur of God on my message today.” This is tantamount to claiming apostolic authority on our words today and disagreement is the same as arguing with the apostles! It is nothing more than self-serving error. I knew of a fellow preacher in the Lord’s church in Northeastern Arkansas who boldly told his congregation that he needed not to study the text because the Holy Spirit would inspire his sermons on Sunday morning! Talk about pompously setting one’s self above review!

Third, it is truly sad to witness the full circle that some have taken in the Restoration Movement. One of Alexander Campbell’s chief aims was to loosen the stranglehold of the clergy. His first volume of *The Christian Baptist* is highlighted by his war against the popular clergy of his day who were doing no different than some among our own people today. The pretense of a divine call to the work of ministry was the object of his withering attacks in 1823 because by it many honest individuals were kept from the truth. He wrote, “Nothing short of divine attestations or miracles can evince that any man is especially called by the Spirit of God to instruct us in the Christian religion.” We might also note here 2 Corinthians 12:12 wherein Paul did not expect the church in Corinth to accept he was divinely appointed by direct operation without *signs* to prove it. I say the same. If God stamps his confirmation upon men directly today, we call for similar miraculous demonstration—and recall that “dreams, intuitions, and warm feelings” will not do.

Fourth, it is instructive to remember that ALL false movements or doctrines endorse themselves with the so-called “direct Holy Spirit endorsement.” Whether it be the pope of

Rome, the Mormon Church, various Pentecostal sects, Protestant preachers, or Indian shamans—they ALL make the same claim for a variety of contradictory doctrines. Which shall we believe? None of them. They all may be well-meaning, but sadly misled.

In Deuteronomy 13:1-5 Moses warned of false prophets. He knew there would arise in the future those who would even give “signs” (prophecies) which would later come to pass. But even so, he added, if their *doctrine* did not agree with that which had already been revealed they were to be rejected. Paul repeated a similar warning in Galatians 1:6-9: “... *But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!*” The ultimate criterion has always been the Word of God.