



# MINUTES WITH MESSIAH

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## A WONDERFUL DRUG

Adrenaline is a wonderful drug. Naturally occurring, it can allow an arthritic, fifty-something, old man to play a game of softball as if he were years younger. Once on the field, the aches and pains disappear and I can play catcher without feeling it in my knees and heels. Of course, as soon as the game is over, sometimes before I can even get from the field to the car, I am again feeling the pain. In fact, it is often worse, because I have just worked my body in ways it is not accustomed to being abused.

Adrenaline is like sin. Sin has a way of masking the pain and consequences. It comes in fancy dress, but underneath is an unwashed body covered with running sores. Sin masks the pain that will result, but it often returns once the sin is completed.

Jesus talks about the consequences of riches, particularly those obtained through questionable means, as being deceitful. "He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful." (Matt 13:22) When working to become rich, rather than working to make a living, one often sees the money, and ignores what it takes to get it. Sometimes the person who desires riches pays for them in terms of broken families, destroyed relationships, bitterness, and hatred. Paul said it is not just riches that are so deceitful. It is anything that consumes a person so fully that they forget self-control and God-control.

That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. (Eph 4:22-24)

Anything we lust after will deceive us. The deception may be, in part, that such things do not satisfy. It may be, in part, that such things do not last. It may be, in part, that we frequently come to hate the object of our lusts. Those are parts of the deceitfulness of lust, but the real problem is that it blinds us to "righteousness and true holiness." God is who satisfies. Following God is the ultimate cure for emptiness. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole of man." (Eccl 12:13)

The ultimate evil of sin is that it masks the pain of separation from God. We can be separated from the promised land, just as Israel was not allowed into the promised rest. The writer of Hebrews says that God has promised us a rest. But sin can keep us from it. "But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." (Heb 3:13) Sin makes us think we are resting, when we are really only tiring ourselves out. Like the adrenaline, it masks the signs of injury. Our spiritual muscles are hardened by sin, but it deceives us into thinking we can move as well as we did at one time.

The problem with an adrenaline rush is that it does not last. It disappears and the pains return. In the same way, sin plays to our short-term vision. The problem is that in doing so it blinds us to the long view. Moses rejected the adrenaline of sin because he could see the long view.

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. (Heb 11:24-26)

While riding a bicycle, I have gotten so tired that I would not look up beyond what was immediately in front of my tires. This short view is dangerous, because there is no time to react when a parked car suddenly appears in front of me. Looking up is the solution to sin. Look up to the long view, the heavenward view, and do not be deceived.

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# ***THE SPIRIT-FILLED CHURCH***

Why aren't more churches spirit-filled; they seem more like country clubs? Churches of Christ (Catholic Churches, Baptist Churches, other churches) are not full gospel churches because they are not spirit-filled. It seems that everybody wants to be in a spirit-filled church, and think that theirs is but other people's churches are not. What does it mean to be a spirit-filled church, according to the Bible? Before we can answer that, perhaps the question should be what is not part of being a spirit-filled church?

## **Filled with whose spirit?**

It is possible to be a spirit-filled church, and not be filled with God's spirit. Sometimes it is a case of being filled with the devil. More often than not, the spirit that fills some churches is that of the people themselves.

It seems that many people who say that other congregations are not spirit-filled are those that believe they possess the miraculous gifts of the spirit. Paul's arguments notwithstanding, some people believe that if you don't have one of the spiritual gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12-14, you don't have the spirit. More specifically, some would argue that if you do not have the

The scriptures show that spiritual gifts would end shortly after the New Testament was written.

gift of speaking in tongues you do not have the spirit. This is just not so.

Great emphasis is put on speaking in tongues. Because it was such a visible gift, even the Corinthian church apparently put undue emphasis on that one gift. That abuse was one of the principal reasons Paul wrote that section of his first letter to the Corinthians. He even argues that the gift of speaking in tongues is the least important of the spiritual gifts. "Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue." (1 Cor 14:19)

Besides this emphasis that one's own gift is the most important, what passes for speaking in tongues today is often evidence more of the individual's spirit than the Holy Spirit. Much of what is claimed as speaking in tongues does not conform to scripture.

In the New Testament, speaking in tongues (languages) was invariably speaking in a known human language not learned in the normal way by the speaker. Thus a person who had no knowledge of Parthian, for instance, could speak to a Parthian. There is no clear scripture that would indicate that the gift included non-human speech, particularly as there would be no reason for a person to speak with anyone who was not human. (That, of course, excepts God, with whom we do speak, but who also presumably needs no translator.) On the other hand, most speaking in tongues practiced today is unintelligible by any human, and is sometimes called the "speech of angels," based on 1 Corinthians 13:1. Some claim to speak in an "unknown" tongue, although that word is not in the text of the scriptures and was supplied by the translators of the King James Version. Most of the time the speakers don't even claim that it is a human language. Therefore, they are presuming to have a gift that was not one of those listed by Paul or described in Acts. The gift they claim is a personal, not a spiritual gift. (Note also that in 1 Corinthians 13 Paul referred to the "languages of men *and* angels." Grammatically, he is saying that the angels speak human languages.)

Speaking in tongues as practiced today is not a Christian phenomenon. How can someone insist that someone else is not spiritual because they don't practice a phenomenon common to many religions? What passes as speaking in tongues today existed in Plato's day. Moreover, it can be found among the Hindus, Buddhists, Moslems, Australian aboriginals, and many Native American cultures, whether as a religious practice or as part of the culture. If so, how does one distinguish between the tongues speaking that is from God and the identical practice that is not? It cannot be done linguistically. Linguists have demonstrated that all of these people speak using syllables from their own languages or languages they have learned. The common conclusion of linguists and psychologists alike is that this kind of speaking in tongues can be learned by anybody in a culture where it is expected of them. In other words, the speaking in tongues practiced by some churches today is a natural phenomenon resulting from peer expectations; it is not from the Spirit but from themselves.

More importantly, the scriptures themselves indicate that the spiritual gifts would end shortly after the New Testament was written. Paul said that prophecies, tongues (as in the miraculous gift), and miraculous knowledge would end "when that which is complete has come." (1 Cor 13:10) That this would be some time before the final judgement is clear because it would be before

faith and hope ceased. Those will endure until faith is swallowed up in knowledge and hope is realized. So tongues and the other miraculous gifts would end sometime before that.

We can put a more definite timeframe on the end of the spiritual gifts than that. Phillip was a spirit-filled man who could perform the miraculous. There was one thing he could not do, however. He could not pass on those gifts to other people.

And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 8:18-19)

The only people who could pass on the ability to perform these gifts were the apostles, and presumably the household of Cornelius. If we have to have the spiritual gifts to be a spirit-filled church, then there has to be a two-thousand-year-old apostle running around somewhere, sneaking up on people and laying his hands on them to give them the gifts. Even the apostle John debunked the idea that he would live that long.

## Actions speak louder

The other criterion many people seem to hold for a spirit-filled church is that the members of that church act like they are spirit-filled. On the face of it, this is a valid criterion. On the other hand, their definition of acting like it is arbitrary and unrelated to scripture. People have been accused of not being spirit-filled because they do not raise their hands, sway, or clap their hands. While there may be nothing wrong with any of these things, they are evidences of emotion rather than evidences of the Spirit.

The wave is a ridiculous practice among fans of American football in which one section of the audience stands and raises their hands, then sits when the next section follows suit. This is not evidence that football audiences are spirit-filled; it is evidence of boredom. (You generally don't see this happen in much faster sports such as baseball, hockey, or what we Americans call soccer.) Clapping hands to the music is common during European figure skating competitions. All it proves is that the audience likes the rhythmic music, and maybe the skater.

Being filled with emotion is not the same as being filled with the Spirit. Emotion naturally flows from being spirit-filled, but being spirit-filled has nothing to do with emotion. Then what does it mean if a church is spirit-filled?

## Spirit-filled churches

There is no such thing as a spirit-filled church. Instead, there are churches that are full of spirit-filled people. Can we really make such a distinction? Yes! Peter told the first believers on Shavuot, “Repent and be

immersed, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for remission of sins, and *your church* will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38) NO! He said the new Christians would receive the Spirit. Any church that consists of people that God has added to his church is spirit-filled because it is filled with spirit-filled people. Regardless of how they act in the assembly, it is Christians that make a church spirit-filled or not. They can sit there, looking dour as a Puritan, and it will still be a church of spirit-filled people. Similarly, a church that has an active assembly, with clapping and up-beat music and shouting, may consist entirely of people who have never repented or been immersed and it will not have a Spirit-filled person in the house. What makes a spirit-filled church? Only Christians; nothing more nor less than Christians.

So what makes a spirit-filled Christian? Only the word of God. I have read web pages and heard sermons that make all sorts of claims about the Bible, but when you look or listen closely you won't find a single reference to actual scripture. They don't quote scripture; they don't give references to where something is found in scripture.

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They leave out the Spirit entirely. Perhaps that is because they forget, or never knew, what Paul said about the Spirit. “And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which [Spirit] is the word of God.” (Ephesians 6:17) The Spirit is the word of God. Any church where the Bible is neither used, mentioned, or studied is a church that is not spirit-filled. Conversely, any church in which the Bible is an important part of its existence is a spirit-filled church. Any church in which the members read the Bible, and, more importantly, live the Bible is a spirit-filled church.

That is all that is required. Faith and obedience. Trust and obey. Be saved and walk in newness of life. A spirit-filled church is just that, Spirit *filled*. It is the Spirit filling the church, or the members of the church, on the inside that counts. It is not externals like gifts or emotional reaction that determines if a church is spirit-filled. It is God and his word.

The Holy Spirit is internal to the members of the church. He may be seen by how the people live, not how they worship. To determine whether a church is spirit-filled you have to see into the lives of the church members. Don't ever let anybody say you are not spirit-filled based solely on externals.

# ***I DON'T BUTTERFLY***

Quite a few years ago, while I was in the Navy, I spent considerable time in the Philippines. The city outside the base, as is frequently the case everywhere, was noted for the number of bars, and the number of women who worked in the bars and on the streets. When I would go into town with some of my shipmates I would invariably be propositioned by one of these women. Knowing how uncomfortable that made me feel, one of my friends offered me a standard response that these girls would understand. They so frequently met men who would cheat on their wives that saying I was married meant nothing to them. But they were also very jealous of their prerogatives, so to speak. If a man was a regular customer he was expected not to be seen with another woman. To do so was known as butterflying, from the action of a butterfly gathering pollen from many flowers. So my friend told me to reply, "I have a girlfriend, and I don't butterfly."

The question then comes up, do we butterfly on God? Is God our one-and-only, or is he our one-among-many? When he took Israel to be his people, he said he wanted them to worship him only. "For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God." (Ex 34:14) He does not change. He still wants to be our only God.

In the latter period of the divided kingdom God sent his prophets to Israel. One of the common messages through the prophets of that period was, "do not butterfly." Well, maybe he phrased it differently. "How shall I pardon thee for this? thy children have forsaken me, and sworn by them that are no gods: when I had fed them to the full, they then committed adultery, and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses." (Jer 5:7)

His message is the same today. "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." (Jas 4:4) "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." (Rev 2:4)

Having established that it is possible to butterfly on God, how can we do it? Perhaps the answer is in that last quotation from the Revelation. We have loved God. When we leave that love, or even give him partial love, we have butterflyed "Hear, O Israel. The Lord your God is one Lord. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might." (Deut 6:4-5) When we give God less, we are just playing around.

With whom can we butterfly on God? Just about anyone or anything. With Israel and Judah it was idols. Most of us don't have that problem these days. Nevertheless, we chase after wealth, power, fame. Sometimes we just chase after money, control of our lives, and being liked. It's all a matter of degree. I have known some people to put their desire for a family in God's place. I guess it would even be possible (maybe even easy) to put chocolate there.

Sometimes it is not even a matter of leaving God. A butterfly may return to the same flower, after all. In the house that is your life you have many rooms. Most of them are open to everyone. Some are open only to God. But do you have a little closet that you keep locked, and just open it once in a while? This is that closet you don't even want God to see. He gets everything else in your life except what is in that little closet. As long as he does not get the key to that closet, you (I) butterfly on God. Give God the key. Tell Satan, "I don't butterfly."

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