



IBFNA

August 2018

Volume 27, Number 1

THE REVIEW

Postmodern Morality Versus the Holiness of God

By Dr. Bob Payne, Moderator IBFNA

I begin with two examples of postmodern morality. Neither one involves a specific example of which I am familiar. Instead, both examples are composites of what I have seen as a pastor through the years. Do either of the following hypothetical situations sound familiar to you?

- John grew up in a fundamental Baptist home and went to a Christian school. He made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ at Christian camp when he was 12. At age 18 John began to feel that he was different. He seemed to be attracted more to men than women. At age 23 John decided that he was “gay” and began having a homosexual relationship with a man. John reasons that it really does not matter whom you love. He believes that he can be a good Christian and still have an intimate relationship with a man. He now attends a church that fully accepts his lifestyle, and he even sings in the choir. John believes that those Christians who believe that he is sinning are hateful, judgmental, and need to obey what Jesus taught in the Gospels about loving one another.
- Mary grew up in a Christian home and made a profession of faith as a young child. She spent three summers as a counselor at a fundamental Baptist camp. Everyone believed that Mary was a solid Christian young person, and they were excited for her when she decided to go four years to a fundamental Baptist college. After college Mary had a substantial college bill and to save money decided to move in and share an apartment with a male friend of hers. Some older Christians were upset with her living arrangements, but in Mary’s opinion those accusers were old, out of touch, and just did not understand. After all, most of her Christian friends at church had no problem with what she was doing. That fact convinced her that living with a man was OK. Plus, she was not sleeping with her roommate anyway.

I have no question that all of us can relate to at least one of these scenarios. Sadly, it is not just compromising, doctrinally weak churches that are having these types of moral dilemmas today; it is solid, fundamental Baptist churches that are seeing immoral incidences of this sort with disturbing regularity. To our postmodern society, truth is a flexible commodity, and this philosophy has been adopted by many in our churches. The plain, normal meaning of the “yeas” and “nays” of the Word of God is rejected and is replaced by what a person's peer group says, or what the Word of God means to the reader. The only absolute is that we should not “judge” someone else.

John Jelinek, after giving his own examples of postmodernism, wrote,



INSIDE PAGES

3

CONFERENCE
REPORT

4

“GOD IN HIS
GIFTS?”

Membership &
Subscription:
IBFNA

6450 Hope Way
Hanover, PA
17331

(475) 329-0585
www.ibfna.org

These examples serve to indicate what has become of truth and absolutes. In an autonomous world, everyone becomes his own truth detector. Everyone has the right to his opinion. Many people will not object if you disagree with them, as long as you do not attempt to get them to change their opinions. At that point, many become defensive and sometimes even angry at the challenge to their "God-given" autonomy. By today's standards, each person has the right to determine his own absolutes. ["Why Be Moral? The Contradictions of Postmodern Morality in America," *Journal of Christian Apologetics* 1, no. 1 (Summer 1997): 4.]

Rick Shrader accurately contrasts the past with the present postmodern age when he writes,

The story is told of three umpires representing the three ages of human history. The first, representing the pre-modern age says, "Three strikes and you're out and I call 'em the way they are." The second umpire, representing the modern age says, "Three strikes and you're out and I call 'em the way I see 'em." The third umpire, representing the postmodern age says, "Three strikes and you're out, and they ain't nothin' til I call em." As we look at the approach of postmodernism, this outlook will become all too clear. Truth does not exist except as the individual wants it to exist. As a matter of fact, he can create his own truth. ["Postmodernism," *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 3, no. 1 (1999): 14-17.]

This denial of absolute truth is really a denial of the one biblical hermeneutic. Instead of allowing the text to speak for itself and taking what rises naturally from the text, the reader now becomes the center of Bible interpretation. The question in hermeneutics is no longer, "What does the text say?" but "What does the reader say about the text?" The reader is free to "deconstruct" the text, and like modeling clay, free to mold it any way he chooses. Homosexuality then is no longer perversion and sin, but it is molded into an alternate lifestyle that has God's stamp of approval on it. "After all," the homosexual reasons, "He created me the way I am." Furthermore, immorality and immoral practices are justified because of a bad spouse or because a person has physical human needs that need to be fulfilled.

So how are we who believe in objective Biblical truth to respond to this complete rejection of absolute truth? I think there are several approaches that churches need to take to deal with this problem.

(1) Make people aware of postmodernism. People need to be aware of the dangers of this humanistic philosophy. If you are a pastor, Sunday School teacher, Bible study teacher, or are discipling a new believer, take some time to teach those under your ministry about postmodernism and why it is wrong. Educate yourself, and recommend reading materials to others. Gene Edward Veith's book, *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture*, is an excellent introduction to the subject, even though it was written a number of years ago.

(2) Make sure people understand what the Bible says about truth, and point to the authority of the Word of God concerning morality and its various applications. If there are no absolutes, why is the Bible so absolute? In 2 Cor. 4:2, Paul informs us: "But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty (or as the BDAG lexicon translates it: "we have renounced the things that one hides out of a sense of shame"), not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation (open proclamation) of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." Paul and his comrades had no hidden agendas or motives. They did not distort or falsify God's Word for their own benefit. They simply, openly proclaimed the TRUTH of God's Word. The Bible is absolute and should be our only standard. Moral sin is plainly condemned throughout the Scriptures.

(3) Teach others about the uncompromising, unadulterated holiness of God. God's holiness demands truth. Scripture tells us that God Himself is the unchanging, absolute standard of a believer's behavior: "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:14-16). This standard of God's holiness is not just one standard that we have the option to follow. It is the only standard that will please the One who is entirely without sin.

(4) Instruct others that the Word of God must be obeyed as written. What God commands are not just suggestions. Like a good postmodernist, King Saul in 1 Samuel 15 tried to make the specific commandment of God more flexible to his situation. Samuel's response to Saul was clear: "And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." The fact is that truth by its very definition is inflexible, and we are to obey the Word of God to the letter.

(5) Teach others about sound hermeneutics. The Bible needs to be interpreted in a normal manner. The reader needs to accept whatever rises naturally and consistently from the text. He is not to add to, change, or deconstruct the plain meaning of God's Word. The late Dr. Clay Nuttall's book, *The Normal Hermeneutic: The One Biblical Hermeneutic*, should be distributed to others. Following the principles in this book will help folks avoid the pitfalls of postmodern and reader-centered Bible interpretation.

(6) Moral issues should be resolved in a biblical manner within the local church, even when the resolution of them is unpopular. The Bible is clear how moral sins are to be handled by a local church. If there is not repentance, the individual is to be church-disciplined. Although it is popular today for churches to simply remove offending members from the church rolls without any other repercussions, the plain meaning of the text of 1 Corinthians 5 goes well beyond a simple change of church records. Sadly, many church members today do not want to "stir things up." Instead, they would rather quietly drop a person from the church membership rolls than publicly confront his sin as the Bible commands.

In summary, the solution to the postmodern morality on display in local churches today is the solid preaching and teaching of the Word of God, particularly in the area of God's holiness. Although objective truth is unpopular to the modern ear, it needs to be constantly, patiently, and lovingly taught. May God give us the grace to faithfully proclaim His truth to this truth-denying generation.

"Having Done All To Stand"

2018 Conference Report

The Lord blessed us with another refreshing and edifying conference that encouraged our stand together for Him. We returned to the renowned hospitality of the South this year and enjoyed the many expressions of kindness and generosity of our host church, the Heritage Hills Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, NC.

As with every IBFNA conference, the highlight of the week was preaching. Host pastor, Steve Pittman, began our week with a message that encouraged us to "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27). The spirit, mind, and striving-together he spoke of was exemplified by his church family. Our hearts were encouraged by both.

Dr. Billy Martin preached on the need both to declare the gospel and to defend the faith under the theme, "Don't stop; the light is green." In a Christ-exalting message, which spoke of Him as "Omnipotence on Display," he encouraged us that we can do all things through Christ as He strengthens us.

Mike McCubbins preached a message on separation from Psalm 23, which emphasized the sense in which we are separated unto the Lord's shepherding care for us. Pastor Ed Kuhar of West Haven Baptist Church spoke of the way Nehemiah was called to



stand in the face of opposition. His references to Baptist history reminded us that in this battle we follow the train of examples both biblical and historical.

Our keynote speaker, Dr. Bud Steadman, challenged our hearts from Jeremiah about conquering fear in ministry, staying on the wheel in the Potter's house, and the folly of superficial religion. Dr. Fred Moritz emphasized the boldness of Paul's gospel ministry, and our out-going Moderator, Dr. Chick Dear, finished the week encouraging us to choose the path of most resistance.



“God in His Gifts”? The Pneumatology of Sam Storms

Pastor Kevin Hobi

As its title suggests, *The Beginner's Guide to Spiritual Gifts* by Sam Storms (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2012), Pastor of Bridgeway Church in Oklahoma City, former professor of theology at Wheaton College, and President of Enjoying God Ministries, endeavors to introduce today's Bible-believing Christian to the practice of the revelatory gifts of 1 Cor. 12:4-11 in their local church ministry [12-13]. The author advocates a continuationist position with reference to these manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

Continuationism is the belief that this special category of the gifts of grace is normative for the church's rule of faith and practice today. Dr. Storms holds the continuationist position in opposition to the cessationist position, which teaches that, unlike other spiritual gifts of grace, the revelatory gifts of 1 Corinthians 12 have ceased because they were temporary works of special-revelation content or authentication, either bestowed primarily on the ministry of the twelve apostles (Heb. 2:3-4) or active more broadly only prior to the completion of the New Testament canon (1 Cor. 13:9-12). For a biblical defense of the cessationist position, see the three-part *Review* series titled, “Has the Gift of Tongues Ceased?” [November 2017, February 2018, May 2018].

Dr. Storms takes very seriously what he sees to be the believer's need to reject cessationism and embrace continuationism: “To reject spiritual gifts, to turn from this immediate and gracious divine enabling, is, in a sense, to turn from God. It's no small issue whether one affirms or denies these manifestations of the divine presence. In affirming them, we welcome Him. In denying them, we deny Him” [13].

In view of the seriousness of this matter as stated by its author, the book's self-identification as “the beginner's guide” is striking. As a cessationist reader, the book informs me that I am a beginner not only in regard to understanding the list of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, but also in regard to experiencing what the author calls “immediate and gracious divine enabling.” Throughout the history of the church, most of its best theologians, reformers, missionaries, pastor-teachers, and godly laymen have been cessationists. Dr. Storms nevertheless asserts that all of these have “in a sense, turn[ed] from God.”

That bold charge has enjoyed surprisingly significant influence in our day. In an October 2017 blog post titled, “Confessions of a Functional Cessationist,” Jason Meyer, Pastor of John Piper's Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, MN, confessed after reading this book that his rule of faith had not lined up well with his practice. He wrote: “Even though I have always been a theoretical continuationist, I am far too often a functional cessationist. In other words, I am a continuationist in theory, but I look a lot like a cessationist in practice. This gap between theory and practice pricks my conscience” [www.desiringgod.org/articles/confessions-of-a-functional-cessationist; accessed 5/1/2018]. The blog mentioned the influence of Dr. Storms' book on Pastor Meyers. At the invitation of Bethlehem Baptist, Dr. Storms spoke at the church's Desiring God Conference for pastors last January, which focused on the work of the Holy Spirit while advocating continuationism.

Dr. Storms takes this matter seriously, in part, because he prefers to speak not of “God and His gifts”

but rather of “God in His gifts” [12]. Pastor Meyer was struck by this detail of the book’s theology: “These words arrested me because if spiritual gifts are manifestations of God, then, in a sense, desiring the gifts is desiring God. Christian Hedonists are not fully desiring God if we stop short of desiring him in his gifts” [*op. cit.*].

Dr. Storms’ arresting words said in part: “Spiritual gifts must never be viewed deistically, as if a God ‘out there’ has sent some ‘thing’ to us ‘down here.’ Spiritual gifts are God present in, with and through human thoughts, human deeds, human words, human love” [12].

Claiming this power for spiritual gifts (especially musical ones) to invoke a special manifestation of God’s presence is a doctrine with deep roots in the history of charismatic worship. Historians Swee Hong Lim and Lester Ruth explain: “Pentecostalism also has brought a certain expectation of experience to the forms of contemporary worship . . . What emerged was a sacramentality of music or corporate song expressed in biblical texts such as Psalm 22:3, where God is said to inhabit, dwell, or be enthroned upon the praises of God’s people. This biblical rooting of the liturgical expectation for encountering God, active and present through the Holy Spirit, molded how the extended worship sets were to be viewed” [*Lovin’ On Jesus: A Concise History of Contemporary Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017), 18].

There are a number of troubling problems with viewing either acts of worship or the exercise of spiritual gifts as invoking literal manifestations of God’s presence, however. First, the foundational text (Ps. 22:3) is metaphorical poetry, so the beautiful picture it paints of God’s enthronement in the praises of His people need not be taken as literally as the Pentecostals have taken it. More likely, the psalmist means simply that the Lord is the rightful object of the praises of His people because of His royalty.

To say we can invoke a special manifestation of God’s presence with our praise or the exercise of a spiritual gift, which He literally inhabits, is to forget that Jesus is already manifestly present in the assembly of His church, which is His temple or dwelling place in this church age (Matt. 18:20; 1 Cor. 3:16). We know this through faith in His promise, which we find in Scripture. We worship in that presence by faith and not by sight. The manifestation of God’s

presence is found in the promise of the Bible, not in a supernatural phenomenon we see, a musical tune we hear, or a special emotion we feel. We need only gather in His name and believe His manifested promise to enjoy the fullness of His presence by faith.

Second, Dr. Storms fails to see that what he mischaracterizes as deistic is in fact an important truth about the attributes of God the Holy Spirit, His transcendence. When he warns: “Spiritual gifts must never be viewed deistically, as if a God ‘out there’ has sent some ‘thing’ to us ‘down here’” [*op. cit.*], he overemphasizes the immanence of God’s Spirit in our lives to the point of forgetting His transcendence. In all He is and does, the Holy Spirit never ceases to be both the God “out there” and the God “down here.” As God He is immutably immanent and transcendent.

Retaining the true transcendence of God’s Spirit in our comprehension of the One who gives spiritual gifts to us helps protect us against a postmodern understanding of those gifts. Without seeing the Holy Spirit “out there,” it becomes easy to confuse His presence “down here” with “human thoughts, human deeds, human words,” and “human love.” Whatever is human in the fruitfulness of spiritual gifts always remains the recipient of the gift, not to be confused with the Giver, nor even the gift.

This potential confusion of the Giver of spiritual gifts with their recipients is attractive in a postmodernist world that has deified the self, and it can foster an inability to distinguish between a Spirit-controlled body presented to the Lord as a living sacrifice of service (Rom. 12:2) and our ever present flesh, which wars against the Spirit (Gal. 5:17). Both are a part of being human, and so the Bible never directs us to our human thoughts, deeds, words, or emotions to find God’s presence, because our flesh makes this approach spiritually dangerous (Jer. 17:9). The distinction between what is human and what is God’s presence must be maintained with clarity in every part of our ministry.

A third troubling feature of the “God in His gifts” doctrine is its misunderstanding of the phrase *manifestation of the Spirit* in 1 Cor. 12:7. Dr. Storms claims: “This is Paul’s way of saying that the Spirit is Himself made manifest or visibly evident in our midst whenever the gifts are in use . . . Spiritual gifts are the presence of the Spirit Himself coming to relatively clear, even dramatic, expression in the way we do

ministry. Gifts are God going public among His people" [13]. Pastor Meyers agrees when he writes, "if spiritual gifts are manifestations of God, then, in a sense, desiring the gifts is desiring God" [*op. cit.*].

The problem with this interpretation stems from the author's treatment of the genitive phrase *of the Spirit*. In Greek, that phrase can be either an objective genitive, meaning that the Spirit is the object being manifested in a spiritual gift, or a subjective genitive, meaning that the Spirit is the subject doing the manifesting in a spiritual gift.

In the context under consideration, the phrase *manifestation of the Spirit* includes a subjective genitive, because *of the Spirit* describes the One who is doing the manifesting. The object manifested is not the Holy Spirit, but the revelatory content or meaning of the various revelations or miracles. And so the context explains them as manifestations done *through the Spirit, according to the same Spirit, and by the same Spirit* (1 Cor. 12:8-9; NASB – the translation Dr. Storms uses to quote the passage). The Holy Spirit does gifting (v. 4) in the same sense that the Lord Jesus does administering (v. 5) and in the same sense that God the Father does operating (v. 6). God the Father is not operated upon, the Lord Jesus is not administered, nor is the Holy Spirit manifested.

Somewhat inconsistently, Dr. Storms seems to understand the phrase as a subjective genitive when he says of the word *charisma*: "*Charisma* refers to a gracious work of God or something God's grace has bestowed" [19]. The manifestations of the Spirit are *charismata* because they are gracious works of the Holy Spirit, something He has bestowed. In a later passage, the author also speaks of the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in giving or withholding gifts [21]. Clearly, the Holy Spirit is the subject of His manifestations, not the object. The manifestations are truths that He is revealing.

So even if it be granted that the revelatory gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12 are normative for today, the idea that they are especially significant manifestations of God the Holy Spirit's presence, what the author calls "God in His gifts," and the idea that we can only rightly desire God's presence if we desire His revelatory gifts, are profound misunderstandings of the grammar, context, and theology of the text. Missing out on these manifestations of the Spirit has nothing to do with missing out on the manifestation of the presence of God the Holy Spirit in our

lives and ministries. To miss out on these manifestations is merely to miss out on certain forms of special revelation that came from the Holy Spirit. The question then becomes whether we need those forms now that we have the complete New Testament. The question is never, "Do we have less of the Spirit's presence without them?"

So where Dr. Storms claims, "the Spirit is Himself made manifest or visibly evident in our midst whenever the gifts are in use," orthodoxy rather affirms that Scripture is God's complete and sufficient self-revelation to man when it comes to special revelation today. Whereas the author claims, "Gifts are God going public," orthodoxy has instead given attention to the public reading of God's Word (1 Tim. 4:13). God has already gone public in the pages of Holy Writ.

Furthermore, to assert that "the way we do ministry" causes the presence of the Holy Spirit to come "to relatively clear, even dramatic, expression" is to get ministry backwards. Instead, the absolutely clear expression of truth from the Holy Spirit in the written Word of God must always define and regulate the "way we do ministry." Nor is it when we have failed to experience revelatory gifts that we have turned from God, but rather when we have failed to study, believe, and submit to His Word. When Dr. Storms asks, "But why should we think the Church in our century stands in any less need of this activity of the Holy Spirit?" [33], orthodoxy answers, "We now have our New Testament, so we do not need these other forms of special revelation, which were necessary only in its absence."

Throughout the pages of *The Beginner's Guide to Spiritual Gifts*, the author admirably attempts to find scriptural support for the continuing practice of the revelatory gifts of 1 Corinthians 12. That is where such support must be found. He explains that he ceased being a cessationist in the quiet of his study with open Bible [10]. But because a number of the gifts listed there are mentioned nowhere else in Scripture, the natural lack of clarity that must come to one seeking to define ancient phenomena no longer in existence today recurs throughout his conclusions. His definitions of the gifts often employ words connoting an educated guess: "perhaps," "seems to," "likely", etc.

Interpretive problems crop up throughout the book. For instance, we are told that "neither tongues nor interpretation are revelatory" [14], but the author

does not explain how they can be less than revelatory but still manifestations (phanerosis) of the Spirit. He discusses “the gift of intercession” [23] and “effectiveness in deliverance” [38], neither of which is in any biblical list of gracious gifts. The sky seems to be the limit when the author explains, “I’ve known people who have a remarkable and extraordinary anointing to help others experience freedom from demonic oppression” [38], or when he asks, “In any case, how do we classify what I experienced when praying for that young man?” [42].

Dr. Storms sees Paul pouring gasoline on the church of Corinth, aflame with the manifestations of the Spirit [30], whereas the apostle’s emphasis is rather to douse those elements of the Corinthian experience that inhibited understanding, some of which we have difficulty today accounting for as true works of God’s Spirit for the simple reason that they needed to be curtailed. Would the work of God’s Spirit require correction like this? Did not Paul say that God is not the source of confusion? (1 Cor. 14:33). Who then, was the source of the confusion in Corinth? Who is its author today?

Dr. Storms teaches that Paul’s phrase, “according to the proportion of his faith” (Rom. 12:6), opens the door for inaccurate prophecies that are real manifestations of the Spirit [34], and he mistakenly assumes that every gift of grace from the Holy Spirit is a manifestation of the Spirit [36]. The revelation from God’s Spirit is always verbally inerrant (2 Pet. 1:19), and Paul gave the label *manifestation of the Spirit* only to the revelatory gifts of 1 Corinthians 12, where he discusses their cessation in chapter 13. Dr. Storms mistakenly interprets that chapter’s point of cessation as the second coming of Christ without any exegetical support [48].

Perhaps the greatest oversight of the work is its failure to address the danger of the supernatural in the hands of false apostles and false Christs. A book seeking to validate revelatory supernatural phenomena in our churches as normative manifestations of “God in” spiritual gifts for today should include some instruction on how to avoid signs and wonders that come from darkness (Matt. 24:24; 2 Thess. 2:9; Rev. 13:14). The book does not even mention these.

Space restrictions will not allow for a more thorough review of Dr. Storms’ influential book here. Corrections to many of his mistaken interpretations about the revelatory gifts of 1 Corinthians 12 and the

point of cessation in 1 Corinthians 13 can be found in the *Review* series referred to earlier and in other works referenced there.

Nevertheless, Dr. Storms is correct when he speaks of the serious and central nature of this issue: “Whether spiritual gifts [i.e., the forms of special revelation from the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12] are for today is not some secondary, tangential issue that exists only for theologians to debate. It directly touches the very mission of the Church and how she lives out her calling” [13].

More than even that, the issue is a dividing line between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Either the cessationist is to be charged with rejecting special revelation from God, or the continuationist is guilty of claiming that something is special revelation when it is not. Someone is making a serious error. Upon completing the NT canon, John warns against making a similar one (Rev. 22:18-19).

Throughout the pages of his book, Dr. Storms assigns honor to revelatory gifts that today belongs to the Scriptures alone. In his advocacy of manifestations of the Spirit, the author cannot help but diminish the sufficiency and power of Scripture [see “Myth #7: Spiritual gifts aren’t necessary now that we have the Bible. Right?”, 33]. This necessity arises out of the simple fact that today there is an unavoidable competition between a complete and sufficient canon, which did not exist prior to the completion of the New Testament, and a desire for new, supernatural, personalized revelation. This tension is undoubtedly why the Lord allowed the gifts of partial revelation to cease once that which is complete had come in the Scripture. We no longer look into a mirror of New Testament truth darkly. The mirror now reflects with complete clarity.

The straightforward honesty of Dr. Storms’ *The Beginner’s Guide* forces us to make an important choice. This much Pastor Meyer has correct, although he has chosen tragically incorrectly. As pressure continues to mount, first to tolerate and then to embrace charismatic doctrine and practice, may we stand with Scripture alone as our rule of faith and practice. “Peeps” and “mutterings” that distract from Scripture are nothing new (Isa. 8:19-20). May the Lord Jesus deliver His Bride from another gospel, another Jesus, and another spirit. And may He give us Paul’s jealous love for her purity in this day of growing confusion (2 Cor. 11:1-4).

Independent Baptist Fellowship of North America
6450 Hope Way
Hanover, PA 17331

COME CHECK OUT THE NEWLY UPDATED IBFNA WEBSITE!

WWW.IBFNA.ORG

Here you can find important information:

Conference information

Review archive

Regular Baptists for Revival archive

Mission statement

Audio of past conferences

Resolutions

Our history

Articles of faith

Constitution

Contact information