

Do Not Let Theology Get in the Way

By Pastor Les Dennis

Concerns about Evangelical Trends

A very disturbing trend has spread throughout the evangelical world. Sincere Christian leaders who think they are teaching believers how to be led of the Spirit are leading themselves and their followers toward disappointment or even worse – deception. These trends began in the charismatic movement, but have spread into nearly all denominations and groups, including Baptist churches.

Many leaders who have become part of this trend are well-meaning and care about the people they lead. This makes it more difficult to issue warnings against their teachings, but it must be done. We must speak the truth in love, but we must still speak the truth.

Do Not Let Your Theology Get in the Way

Among Christian leaders who attempt to change the doctrine of a church, a common statement is: *we should not let theology get in the way of being led by the Spirit*. When a Christian leader says this it sounds very spiritual, but what does it really mean? On the surface, it seems to mean that we should follow the Spirit directly without interference from our preconceived ideas. We are told to listen to the Spirit and be willing to instantly do whatever He tells us to do.

However, theology is more than just preconceived ideas and should never be set aside as something that is getting in the way of what the Spirit is leading us to do. Actually, theology can and does help us recognize the difference between the *spirit of truth* and the *spirit of error*.

Theology is the study of God. Christian theology is the study of what Scripture says about God. To study the Bible without preconceived ideas is good, but to listen to the Spirit without a knowledge of what Scripture says about God is to fall prey to our own subjective thoughts and self talk and possibly demonic deception.

True or False

Theology is either true theology or false theology. If saying *we should not let theology get in the way* means do not let false theology get in the way, I would quickly agree, for we should never let false theology or false teaching get in the way of obeying God. If saying *we should not let theology get in the way* means do not let true or correct theology get in the way, it is a dangerous statement, because correct theology is the truth of God as given in Scripture. We dare not say *do not let the truth of God get in the way of what we do*. If our theology is wrong, the Christian leader who says it is wrong should show us our error from Scripture. We must not just ignore all theology including correct theology and risk running aground on dangerous shores.

Correct Theology

Correct theology comes from a systematic study of all the Scriptures that apply to the doctrine in question. We start by finding out what the Bible says, not by examining our own subjective experiences. Subjective experiences must never replace Scripture as our source of truth.

Because the Holy Spirit never leads counter to the truth of God, we have a responsibility to learn the truth of God (theology) from Scripture and apply it to our lives. If we think that we can ignore the truth of God while we listen to the Spirit, we are sadly mistaken. If we do not know the truth of God, we are unlikely to know whose spirit we are following.

How to Be Sure of the Spirit's Leading

If we know Jesus, have confessed all known sin to God (1 John 1:9), and are yielded to Him as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1), we are filled with His Spirit and sensitive to His leading.

Proverbs 3:5-6 says this in a slightly different way. It is a key passage for the normal everyday life of the believer who is being led by the Spirit. If we trust in the Lord with all our heart, if we do not depend on our own understanding but depend upon the Lord, and if we acknowledge the work of God in our lives, we have the promise that He will direct our paths. If the Lord is directing our paths, we are being led of the Spirit.

Most of the time God expects us to plan our day with the common sense He gave us, while maintaining an attitude of trusting and acknowledging Him, but there are times when He will adjust our course by prompting us to do something specific. When the Spirit prompts us to do something specific, He speaks with His inaudible voice of certainty. We will know what He wants us to do in time to do it.

Since the Spirit brings to remembrance all that Jesus taught, we need to have regular exposure to Scripture so that the Spirit will have Scriptures to bring to our remembrance. When the Spirit brings to remembrance truth about God, does this not bring us back to theology? The more Scripture to which we have been exposed, the more the Holy Spirit has that He can bring to our remembrance.

Why Not Just Listen to the Spirit for Guidance?

There are no shortcuts to being led by the Spirit. While on the surface it sounds spiritual to go directly to the Spirit and listen to Him, there are at least two hidden dangers. It is never a good idea for us to ignore what God says and do it our own way.

Danger Number One

The first hidden danger in teaching people to listen to the Spirit directly is that there is not one Scripture that tells us to listen to the Spirit. Since this is a major emphasis for many Christian leaders, you would think they could supply at least one verse that clearly tells us to listen to the Spirit.

Although there is not one verse of Scripture that tells us to listen to the Spirit directly, there are a few statements such as the one in Revelation 3:22 that tell us to hear what the Spirit says to the churches, but what the Spirit actually says to the churches is written in the passage and in other similar verses. Because what the Spirit says to the churches is written, it removes the subjective element and the accompanying danger of self-deception.

Danger Number Two

The second hidden danger in teaching people to listen to the Spirit directly is that it is too subjective. Since the Bible does not teach this as a way to be led of the Spirit, it opens the door for our own human spirit or self talk or other spirits to step in and fulfill our expectations.

Subtle Shift away from Scripture toward Subjective Experiences

Typically, those religious leaders who do not want theology to interfere with what they do neglect Scripture in their public teaching and preaching. They may use Scripture but they subtly shift the emphasis from Scripture toward experiences as they encourage the congregation to listen to the Spirit and do whatever He says to do. This usually creates an expectation that the Spirit is going to produce supernatural manifestations in the meeting. There may be scores of people, hundreds of people or even thousands of people sitting expectantly waiting for the Spirit to do something supernatural. Sometimes the music is designed to encourage the mind to go passive and wait for something to happen. Most people who frequent such events have been culturally conditioned to expect certain

things and at least some of those present at these meetings will act according to the cultural expectations of their own minds, convincing some people that the Spirit is being manifested.

Supernatural Manifestations or Crowd Psychology?

Consider this: when a crowd is passively “listening” to the Spirit, an expectation that the Spirit will do something supernatural creates an emotional sense of excitement while the crowd awaits the manifestations. That is why the so called supernatural manifestations can be silly (such as animal noises, jerking, laughing excessively) or worse. This is more likely to be crowd psychology than manifestations of the Spirit. It should be noted that one part of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 is self-control.

Who Said It Would Be Easy?

In the spiritual realm, deception is rarely easy to detect. If it were easy to detect, it would not be very effective.

We must always be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit because the Spirit does prompt us to do things and gently guides us in the path in which we should go, but we must avoid deceptions from the spirit of error. To attempt to listen to the Spirit while setting aside knowledge of how God works so that theology will not get in the way is a very high-risk behaviour.

Don't Put the Spirit in a Box

The Spirit is sovereign and prompts us according to His own timetable. He is described by Jesus as being like the wind and we do not know where He comes from or where He goes. We cannot put the Holy Spirit in a box and expect Him to speak when we choose to listen. He prompts us when He chooses to do so, not when we choose to listen.

Conclusion

The next time you hear a Christian leader say you *should not let theology get in the way of being led by the Spirit*, ask yourself what it is that the Bible says about God that creates a problem for that leader.

To neglect the truth as to how God leads us by His Spirit and how He motivates us is to risk missing His will while we keep looking for the Spirit in some supernatural way. We must never invite spiritual deception from our own human spirit or other spirits by neglecting the truth of God's word. We must be led by the Spirit of truth and not the spirit of error.