

All Rights Reserved By HDM For This Digital Publication  
Copyright 1998 Holiness Data Ministry

Duplication of this CD by any means is forbidden, and  
copies of individual files must be made in accordance with  
the restrictions stated in the B4Ucopy.txt file on this CD.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **SIGNS AND MANIFESTATIONS VERSUS FAITH**

**By Thomas Cogswell Upham**

Nazarene Publishing Company  
Los Angeles, California

Printed Book: No Date -- No Copyright

\* \* \* \* \*

Digital Edition 03/31/98  
By Holiness Data Ministry

\* \* \* \* \*

## **CONTENTS**

- 01 -- Sign Seeking A Work Of Unbelief
- 02 -- Examples Of Sign Seeking
- 03 -- Various Signs Sought
- 04 -- A Notable Example
- 05 -- Not Samples Of True Christian Living
- 06 -- Dependence Upon Signs Contrary To God's Plan
- 07 -- A Practical Test
- 08 -- Faith, The Cornerstone, Is Followed By Feeling
- 09 -- Manifestations Proper In Their Place
- 10 -- We Are Not To Be Unduly Exalted By Special Manifestations

\* \* \* \* \*

## **01 -- SIGN SEEKING A WORK OF UNBELIEF**

The views which have been taken of the life of faith will aid us in forming a proper estimate of a tendency, which is often noted among the followers of Christ, to seek for signs, tokens and manifestations as the basis, in part at least, of their full reconciliation with God and of a holy life. We are aware that this tendency arises, in some cases, from ignorance but there can be no doubt that it has its origin chiefly in that dreadful malady of our nature, the sin of UNBELIEF. But

considered in any point of view, and as originating in any cause whatever, we cannot regard it as otherwise than wrong in principle, and as exceedingly injurious in its consequences. In reading, not long since, the Memoirs of the pious and devoted Lady Maxwell, our attention was directed to a consecration of herself to God at an early period of her life, conceived in terms which, as it seemed to us, a more matured judgment, and a more advanced experience of God's faithfulness, such as she had in the later periods of her life, would not have entirely approved. The portion of this interesting act of consecration to which reference is here particularly made, is as follows:

"If thou, Lord, wilt manifest thy dear Son to me, clear up my evidence of my interest in him, shed abroad his love at all times in my heart, and let me feel him ever drawing me to himself with the cords of love, and in times of trial make his strength perfect in my weakness, and not desert me in duty nor in temptation: if thou, Lord, wilt do these great things for me, then, in thy strength, I give myself unto thee, soul, body, and spirit, in the bonds of an everlasting covenant never to be forgotten."

It seems to be a fair inference, from these expressions, that this pious lady had an earnest desire at the period of making this consecration to devote herself entirely to God; but that she had not faith enough, or perhaps we might properly say, she was afraid to commit herself without reserve into the hands of her heavenly Father; which is the true idea of consecration, and without which no act of consecration can be of any value. In other words, she had not faith enough to make this important surrender or renunciation of self (a renunciation which is so indispensable to a full realization of the inward life) without some special testimony of his favor, some inward sign, some specific feeling; something, probably not very definitely represented even to her own conceptions, which should assure her, antecedently to the full surrender on her part, of the divine acceptance.

\* \* \* \* \*

## 02 -- EXAMPLES OF SIGN SEEKING

Many persons, who have seen and have corrected the error, and are now living the true life of faith, can testify that in the earlier periods of their experience they have hesitated and been perplexed in a similar manner. And as the subject is practically one of great importance, it may be proper to introduce here some instances and illustrations, in addition to what has already been said.

A religious person whose experience is given in a recent publication says: "My anxiety for advancement in holiness increased. My mind became exceedingly burdened. I was convinced that I must make a new and ENTIRE consecration of myself to God, yet shrank from such a total surrender. I sometimes felt that if the Lord would make some communication to my soul as a PLEDGE that he was ready to meet me and would grant sufficient grace in case I entered into such a solemn covenant to be his, I could then venture to engage to live henceforth for him alone; but, through weakness of faith, I dared not venture forward upon his naked promise. No such aid to my faith, however, was granted. I saw that the surrender must be UNCONDITIONAL."

Says another writer in the same work: "I continued seeking for light on this subject, when one night, after a severe struggle with unbelief, I covenanted with the Lord, that, if he would keep me from all sin through the next day I would then believe that such a state might be enjoyed on earth. All was now calm. I rose in the morning in the same peaceful frame of mind, and at the close of the day I could not but acknowledge that I had enjoyed something to which I had ever before been a stranger. An incident occurred which at any other time would have excited feelings of anger; but it did not in the least disturb the deep quiet which reigned within. The time had arrived for me to fulfill my covenant promise. But alas! unbelief triumphed, and I desired ANOTHER SIGN, which was the continuation of this full salvation for one week. I thought this manifestation of saving grace would put the doctrine beyond any further doubt. But I had had sufficient evidence. I had persisted in unbelief; and my request was not granted."

\* \* \* \* \*

### 03 -- VARIOUS SIGNS SOUGHT

Those who are seeking religion in the first instance, and those who are aiming at its highest attainments, frequently ask for various signs, tokens and manifestations -- either in express words or by the hidden language of the secret tendency of the mind. Probably most of these desired signs, tokens, and manifestations may be brought together under three heads or classes:

The FIRST class are those which are external:-- sometimes an object of vision addressed to the outward sight -- sometimes a sound addressed to the outward hearing -- or some remarkable combination of circumstances in relation to our persons or families -- or something peculiar and striking in God's providence -- or perhaps the suggestion of passages of Scripture of a certain character -- or the personal appearance of the Saviour, revealed either in his earthly or his celestial body, and made present to the outward vision. The manifestation which was made to Paul in his journey to Damascus, when he saw a bright light shining from heaven, and heard a voice, and perhaps also that of Stephen, when he saw the heavens opened and beheld the Saviour at the right hand of God, were of this class.

The SECOND class are those which are internal, in distinction from those which are external, but still are essentially of a perceptive or intellectual nature; that is to say; are not necessarily attended with an effect upon the heart. A person, for instance, may inwardly and intellectually have a revealed perception of heaven, of angels ascending and descending, of bright and rejoicing companies of the saints, or of anything else which is a matter of knowledge and revelation, whether it has relation to the world of happiness or the world of woe. Such manifestations are not seen outwardly or by the outward sense, but when they are really from God, are made known by a divine communication operating in the intellectual part. And this is done so distinctly as entirely to control belief, though it is not necessarily attended with holy emotion. We have an instance of this in the apostle Paul, when without knowing whether he was in the body or out of the body, he was caught up, as it were, into the third heaven, and beheld things unutterable.

The THIRD class are peculiarities in emotive and effective experience -- in other words, the existence of specific emotions and affections of a peculiar kind -- such as the experience of sorrow in a very intense degree, or a peculiar strength and fullness of joy, or a deep and silent

awe, or an indefinable melting of the heart in rapturous ecstasies. And not infrequently we characterize the emotion or affection for which we seek as the sign or testimony of our good estate, by its likeness to the alleged experience of some of our religious acquaintances. In other words, we desire a form of experience like theirs; not only resembling it in its nature, but resembling it in its modifications or peculiarities. That which seems to constitute the sign in these cases is: the peculiarity of the thing, the specific character of the thing, more than the thing itself.

But whatever the specific thing may be, there can be no doubt as to the general fact, viz., that a special experience of some kind, either inward or outward, either in the perceptions or the feelings, is often desired and sought after, and is sometimes made an absolute condition (both by those who are seeking religion in the first instance, and by those who are seeking the additional grace of sanctification) before they are willing to trust themselves in the hands of God, to be wholly and unreservedly his. In order to exercise faith in God, they must have something to build upon besides God himself -- a striking proof of the deep distrust and unbelief of the human heart, and how blind man is when left to himself, and how surely he would rush to his own destruction.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### 04 -- A NOTABLE EXAMPLE

While it is by no means the only such example that has come within my notice, I recollect to have read the life of a pious woman who was a member of the Presbyterian church which seemed to me to be an illustration of what has been said. I refer to the life of Miss Elizabeth Cairns, published many years since in Scotland.

There is reason to think, from the statements which are given in this interesting memoir, that the Spirit of God operated upon the mind of this devout person from early life. But not having received suitable instructions in the nature of true religious experience at an early period, she seems to have been led very thoroughly into the system of living by special manifestations, and those high emotions which are apt to be attendant on them.

When she had these special "manifestations," especially if they were remarkable ones, she was exceedingly happy. She regarded them as the tokens of the Divine favor; and it was but natural that she should rejoice. But when they were withdrawn, a mental reaction almost invariably took place, and she became exceedingly miserable; so that her life exhibited an unpleasant alternation of elevations and depressions -- of the joyful and of the terrific -- of rapture and wretchedness.

In her seasons of desertion as she regarded them her temptations were great and almost overwhelming. It almost seemed to her darkened view as if the very being as well as the presence and glory of God was blotted out of existence. Some good people who sympathized in her desires after holiness endeavored to instruct her in a better way, but she had so long lived upon special and powerful illuminations, which she had been in the habit of regarding as the only sure signs and testimonies of her good estate, that she found it difficult to understand their views, and still more difficult to put them in practice.

She speaks particularly in her memoir of an experienced Christian friend, who, perceiving the temptations and wretchedness that followed her seasons of high manifestations, endeavored to aid her. "This person told me," she relates, "that I must part with that life, or I must go out of the world, as also she told me of a life of FAITH a believer lived by in this world; and that sensible manifestations were reserved for eternity. And by similitude she taught me, that Christ did with his young converts as a woman doth with her child when it is young. She carries it in her arms and leads it by the hands; but when it comes to more strength, she lets it walk alone, and take a fall and rise again: and yet her love is still the same. So doth Christ with his people. In their first entry into his way he manifests much of his love to them, but when they come to more experience, he withdraws SENSE from them that they may be taught to walk by faith; but yet his love is still the same to them. This was good advice; but, alas! I knew not how to take it."

At a later period of her life she remarks: "I did not know a life of faith, but still pursued a life of sense, foolishly thinking, with Peter, to dwell in the mount of manifestations. Oh, the great mistake I was in! For although the Lord had graciously visited me with many earnest and pledges of his love, and thereby satisfied me as to my interest in the common salvation, yet I did not know that I should have submitted to his will, and put a blank in his hand as to more extraordinary allowances."

As has already been intimated, the consequence of this mistake was that this pious individual was exposed to many internal troubles. She gives us to understand that in the intervals of her more extraordinary experiences she felt the ragings of sin within, was in deep sorrow, at times had but little access in prayer, and was tempted to impatience, atheism, and self-destruction. We may very properly ask here, Could we well expect it to be otherwise? When we arrive at the true and fundamental element of a holy life, we shall find that God has but one way. And we may be assured that he will honor and bless his own method of holy living, and no other.

\* \* \* \* \*

## 05 -- NOT SAMPLES OF TRUE CHRISTIAN LIVING

The remarks which have been made upon this case will apply very well in many particulars, to the religious experience of Miss Anthony, formerly a resident of Newport, Rhode Island, and a member of the Congregational Church. Her life was written by Dr. Hopkins, a man well known for his theological labors. It exhibits the same traits, though not in an equal degree, with those which characterize the Memoir which has just been remarked upon.

It is well known that there are many memoirs of pious persons which are almost wholly made up of marked and wonderful manifestations, sometimes purely intellectual, and consisting of what may be called spiritual revelations or discoveries, and sometimes accompanied with great joys and raptures, but which are generally characterized by being followed by long intervals of darkness, temptation, and oftentimes of sin. Accordingly, the whole life of the person in many narratives of this kind is a series of alternations of these very diverse states, whereas a life of simple and childlike faith in God's word, based upon an unreserved and permanent consecration, keeps the soul as it were in equilibrium, converting darkness into light, removing rocky and precipitous obstructions, and making all things even.

It is certainly an important question, whether such written and published memoirs as have been mentioned are so useful reading for the religious community as they are generally supposed to be. I have often been deeply impressed with the conviction that in some important respects they tend to give an erroneous view of the true nature of the religious life. They do not sound to me like the life of Paul, and still less like the life of the Saviour. Yet, they are generally regarded as more interesting, and are undoubtedly much more exciting than the lives of those eminent Christians who persevere in the even and delightful tenor of their way, thinking but little of themselves and much of Christ, but little about their own happiness and much about the glory of God -- like Thauler of the fourteenth century -- like the author of the "Imitation of Christ" -- like Fenelon and Leighton of later times -- like Edwards and Wesley -- who lived and labored, and suffered in the fulfillment of a constant consecration, and in the exercise of a constant trust in their heavenly Father.

\* \* \* \* \*

## 06 -- DEPENDENCE UPON SIGNS CONTRARY TO GOD'S PLAN

(1) In view of what has been said heretofore, we remark, in the first place, that God does not design that men in the present life should live by means of specific signs, testimonies, or manifestations, but by simple faith alone. The great design of the Gospel, in its practical and final result on man, seems to be to restore and firmly establish the lost principle of faith, as the true and only available basis of the religious life. And there seems to be a necessity that it should be so. From the nature of the case, there never can be any true reconciliation and harmony between God and his creatures, until they have such confidence in him as to receive his declarations, and to draw their life, as it were, from the words which have proceeded out of his mouth. In any other way of living, whatever may be the nature of their inward or outward experiences, they live at variance with the order and the plans of God -- out of the line of his precepts, and of course, in the same degree, out of the range of his blessings. Hence it is, that we find the remarkable expressions of the Saviour to the doubting disciple: "Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have NOT seen, and yet have believed."

\* \* \* \* \*

## 07 -- A PRACTICAL TEST

We desire here, as a matter of some importance, to lay down a practical test or rule on this subject. It is this: Whenever we desire a specific sign or manifestation antecedently to the exercise of faith we are seeking something additional to the mere declaration and word of God. There is obviously a lingering distrust in the mind which jostles us out of the line of God's order -- which is not satisfied with his way of bringing the world into reconciliation with himself, and under the influence of which we are looking around for some new and additional witness for our faith to rest upon. In other words, although, we may not be fully conscious of it, we desire a sign. In the language of the experienced Mr. Fletcher of Madley, "we want to see our own faith." This is a state of mind that requires sight with which to see our faith is inconsistent with faith and destructive of faith.

This simple test will aid us very much in revealing to us the true state of our hearts. We repeat it, therefore, that we may know whether in general the testimony or sign we are seeking is of God: When we seek for some sign or manifestation, whatever it is, antecedent to that exercise of faith -- (which is willing to leave what we desire and everything related to us submissively in the hands of God) -- we may know that we are not seeking for a testimony or sign that is not required of God as the condition of our faith and obedience.

(2) We remark again, that the life of specific signs, testimonies, and manifestations, is not only evil by being a deviation from the way of faith, but is evil also by keeping alive and cherishing the selfish principle, instead of destroying it. He who seeks to live in this manner, instead of by simple faith, and who thus shows a secret preference of specific experiences modeled after his own imaginations of things, to that pearl of great price which is found in leaving all things with God, necessarily seeks to have things in his own way. The way of faith is the way of self-renunciation; the humbling and despised way of our personal nothingness. The way of signs, testimonies, and manifestations, is the way of one's own will; and therefore naturally tends to keep alive and nourish the destructive principle of selfishness. The lives of those who attempt to live in this way, with some variations in particular cases, may be regarded as an evidence of the general correctness of these remarks. They seem like children brought up in an unwisely indulgent manner; not infrequently full of themselves when they are gratified in the possession of their particular object, and full of discouragement, peevishness, and even of hostility, which are the natural results of the workings of self, when they are disappointed.

(3) We observe, in the third place, that another evil of that system of the religious life which is based upon signs and upon preconceived and prescribed manifestations and experiences is that it exposes persons to alternations and reverses of feeling, which are injurious to the subjects of them, and are prejudicial to the cause of religion in the eyes of the world. Remarkable manifestations and experiences are usually of short continuance. While the manifestations or specific experiences whatever they may be continue the mind is in a state of wondering and generally joyous excitement. But when the termination of these seasons comes, then succeeds the period of mental depression, of darkness that can almost be felt, of horrible temptations -- Satan saying to the soul continually, "Where now is thy God?" And how can it well be otherwise, when those who take this erroneous course pray and wrestle for sight rather than for faith, and for revelations which gratify the natural curiosity, rather than for righteousness, which purifies the heart?

(4) It seems impossible to us, for God to bring a soul to the highest results of religion and to truly sanctify it, so long as it continues in this disposition of seeking a sign, attempting to live spiritually by means of signs, and in effect trying to regulate God and to prescribe conditions to Infinite Love. One very satisfactory expression of sanctification is UNION WITH THE DIVINE WILL -- having no will but God's: "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." It is this union of spirit with spirit, of will with will, which God especially requires, just so far as there is a divergence of the human will from the divine, just in that degree it is very evident there is a want of holiness.

God's will is -- that we should trust him, both his character and his declarations -- that in respect to his various dealings with us we should lie submissive and passive in his hands -- that

the language of our hearts should be at all times, "Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight." But he who seeks a sign, an inward or outward testimony of any kind, obviously fails to exercise the required trust in God. Consequently, being wanting in the true spirit of harmony and union with God, he cannot rightly be regarded, while remaining in this state, as a person to whom the character of sanctification or holiness can be properly ascribed.

(5) We remark finally, that a life of faith is not necessarily exclusive of feeling. The difficulty which exists in the minds of those who entertain the idea that a life of faith is a life without feeling, arises from that limited view of things which considers faith in its own nature, exclusive of its relations and results. And it may be well to say here, that a thing is never properly understood, and cannot be properly understood and known, unless it is understood and known in its relations and results, as well as in itself. On this ground, we assert that the relations and results of faith are such that it is a great mistake to say that a life of faith is a life without feeling.

\* \* \* \* \*

## 08 -- FAITH, THE CORNERSTONE, IS FOLLOWED BY FEELING

In our inquiries into the nature of the religious life we wish to ascertain the foundation principle, the cornerstone. We cannot have any hesitation in saying, both from the Scriptures and from the nature and reason of the thing, that this principle is, and must be, FAITH. There may be feeling of some kind without faith, but there cannot be truly acceptable religious feeling without faith. Faith must precede. I think we may lay it down as a fixed and unalterable principle that any feeling, however strong it may be, which exists antecedent to faith, or which exists irrespective of faith, can never be relied on as of a truly religious and saving value. But if the true doctrine is that faith should go first, it is nevertheless true, that feeling will come after. In all cases where there is genuine faith in God, in Christ, and in all Divine declarations, feeling in its various appropriate forms will naturally and necessarily flow out. It will be such feeling as God approves -- such feeling as filled the bosom of the Saviour while here on earth -- always appropriate to the occasion -- sometimes gentle and sometimes strong, sometimes characterized by joy and sometimes by sorrow -- always bearing the marks of purity and benevolence, but always when the exercise of faith exists in the highest degree it is distinguished by the beautiful trait of calmness and peace.

\* \* \* \* \*

## 09 -- MANIFESTATIONS PROPER IN THEIR PLACE

We might pursue this important subject further, but we leave it with a single observation, accompanied by a reference to an experienced and able writer. We desire it to be understood as consistent with what has been said, that such specific signs, revelations, and manifestations as have been referred to are good in their place. And if it be inquired what their place is, the proper answer seems to be: When they are sent of God, unsought by the creature.

It is the prerogative of God to glorify himself in his own way. It is alike the privilege and the duty of men to leave themselves submissively in his hands. If God sees fit to make remarkable



revelations of eternal things, as he did on a few occasions to Stephen, and Paul, and John, or in any other ways to impart some marked peculiarities to our experience, we are to receive them in a becoming temper of mind. To such occasions the humble Christian will leave them, being deeply impressed with his own ignorance and dependence, and desiring nothing but that he may be holy.

\* \* \* \* \*

## 10 -- WE ARE NOT TO BE UNDULY EXALTED BY SPECIAL MANIFESTATIONS

Fletcher of Madley says: "If God indulge you with ecstasies and extraordinary revelations, be thankful for them; but be not exalted above measure by them. Take care, lest enthusiastic delusions mix themselves with them; and remember that your Christian perfection does not so much consist in building a tabernacle upon Mount Tabor, to rest and enjoy RARE SIGHTS THERE, as in resolutely taking up the cross, and following Christ to the palace of a proud Caiaphas, to the Judgment hall of an unjust Pilate, and to the top of an ignominious Calvary. Ye never read in your Bibles, 'Let that glory be upon you which was also upon Stephen, when he looked up steadfastly into heaven, and said, "Behold! I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God:" But ye have frequently read there, 'Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who made himself of no reputation, but took upon him the form of a servant, and being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.'"

\* \* \* \* \*

THE END