

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRUE
AND FALSE IMPRESSIONS

By E. E. Shelhamer

There are many people confused as to clear leadings. Satan takes advantage of their conscientiousness, either to sidetrack them or to hinder their onward progress. Let us notice a few ways to distinguish between true and false religious impressions.

False Impressions. First, a hurry spirit. Doubtless this is the principal characteristic of fanaticism. The devil hurries and drives souls, while God gently leads them. You can settle it that a pseudo-religious demon is around when something urges you to do this or that "right now or you will never have another opportunity"; or, "if you fail to do your duty this time, the Spirit will be grieved and may leave you forever." Or again, "You ought to drop this work and go at once to that neighbor and pray with him." Or once more, "Write that letter immediately and unburden your heart." These and similar suggestions as a rule are from below, and should not be heeded. God may lead you to do these very things, but will always give sufficient time to pray and consider, gently leading up to the point of action by some providential circumstance.

Second, an unteachable spirit. This is a sure characteristic of those who are given to false impressions. They say they are not self-willed, but simply stand for the truth. They are sure their position is right, that it would be compromising to make any concessions or acknowledgments whatever. It is quite safe to say that when a person never voluntarily owns a fault or confesses his weakness, he is afflicted with spiritual pride and bigotry.

Wesley said: "Be always ready to own any fault you have been in. If you have at any time thought, spoken or acted wrong, be not backward to acknowledge it. Never dream that it will hurt the cause of God. No, it will further it. Be therefore open and frank when you are taxed with anything. Do not seek to either evade or disguise it, but let it appear just as it is." Who ever saw a fanatic approve and practice these wise words? Not he! He will invariably defend himself and cannot take a reproof without meekness. He mistakes his own leadings for that of the Spirit, his own self-will for divine convictions, his own preoccupied opinions for the authority of heaven. He is not content to live in his own light, but wants to force others to do likewise. Brother, sister, if God holds you to a certain line of eating, dressing, getting pictures taken, keeping the Sabbath, etc., do it meekly, but do not think that you are called to blow a trumpet, or compel others to walk in the same light. If God leads you to tell your convictions, do it in meekness; and if they are of God, He will carry them home, and they will produce like convictions. Remember you do not have to everlastingly repeat the same thing every time you get a chance. This is a sure sign that you are driven by a strange and restless spirit that is not of God.

Third, something new and startling. Those who are led by false impressions are always discovering and relating wonderful things. A familiar expression with them is, "The Lord showed me," "The Holy Ghost told me." They put great stress upon dreams, visions and voices. Wonderful things come to them "while upon their knees." Wonderful answers to prayer! Wonderful things God reveals to them in the night seasons! Yes, it is all wonderful. These new discoveries and revelations eclipse all others and leave everybody in the shade.

True, sometimes God leads conscientious souls

out on various lines, to create a new order of things, but when He does, He generally chooses those who are so well saved that there is no advertising of self or personal holiness. He generally chooses those who are magnanimous enough to avoid censuring and discounting others for not quickly indorsing and walking in the same light.

Fourth, changeableness. False impressions are changeable and unreliable, soon to come and soon to go. Such souls are visionary and impracticable. They are first at one thing and then another, first strongly called to one line of work, then to another, first seeing Scripture teaching one view, then another.

Remember this. As a rule impressions and convictions which come very suddenly and produce high emotions, are not so reliable and enduring as those that begin in a more unassuming manner and increase in strength as time goes by. False leadings are very strong and enchanting at first, but are quick to fluctuate and diminish. So that when one begins to follow them, he will soon lose his moorings and, like a ship without ballast or rudder, there is no telling what he will embrace and to where he will drift. We have known such souls to come to the table, then suddenly decide to fast; pack up to take a trip and go as far as the depot, then decide not to go; prepare for a washing, baking, or ironing, then when everything was ready, decide to do something else. It is certainly sad to see souls driven on one way, then another, and waste a lot of time, money and energy in vain.

Fifth, false impressions lead to exaggeration. A close observer can readily tell when he comes in contact with one given to wild imaginations. These always speak with a pomposity and positiveness that do not savor of genuine meekness. Fletcher says: "The fanatic speaks far more confidently than the real humble, holy, inspired saint of God." G. D. Watson says: "Fanaticism finds mountains in mole hills. A little congregation of a hundred or so is reported to be several hundred; a little passing incident to be a great fulfillment of Bible prophecy. The real saints have always shunned the spirit of exaggeration, for a lie is none the less a lie for being wrapped in the pious garb of religious enthusiasm."

Sixth, false impressions despise authority. A fanatic is heard to express himself thus: "There are no strings on me. I do not belong to anything but God. That's enough for me. I used to be afraid of men, but bless God, I am no longer afraid of the face of clay!" We have seen these dear souls shout, roll their eyes and take things by storm when it was apparent that a strange, irresistible power took possession of them and they could not help doing what they did. Oh, brother, sister, be sure that you "believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they be of God."

Now, let us consider some characteristics of *True Impressions*. When a leading or impression is from God, it will harmonize in at least five respects:

First, the plain teaching of the Word—not a single passage here and there, but the general teaching and tenor of the Scriptures.

Second, the clear distinction of the Spirit. He never contradicts or despises any portion of the Word. He never repudiates former leadings that were clear and satisfactory. He never becomes agitated or in a hurry.

Third, providences. Circumstances and openings will help point in the right direction. You need not knock a door down, nor pry it open to do the will of God. "I will guide thee with mine eye."

Fourth, Christian counsel. When God is lead-

ing, you are safe in conferring and seeking advice from those who are spiritual and faithful to your soul. But it is a bad sign if you avoid these and prefer to keep your plans hidden, or go to those who will pamper and humor you.

Fifth, good common sense. God never forces one to do indecent and outrageous things. All He demands will appeal to sound reason, purity of life and honesty with your fellow-men.

Duty calls in but one direction at a time. When there is confusion and uncertainty as to which course to take, the proper thing to do is to hold still and *do nothing, absolutely nothing*. God does not require you to decide, or act until the mist clears away. When there are but two things left to do, do not pursue either course until you feel equally clear to abandon one or the other. To insure Divine guidance, always be sure of aiming at just one thing—the glory of God. When there is no unsanctified ambition at stake and God knows it, the soul can afford to wait His time and then unhesitatingly move forward.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

A. C. Watkins

A lady who had heard many holiness preachers and sermons, and under some of them had professed the experience of entire sanctification, continued professing this experience with more or less of satisfaction, yet some misgivings under radical Holy Ghost preaching, until following the teaching of unusually close messages she was constrained to seek and really obtain the experience of a pure heart.

She then became a happy and victorious possessor. She delights in the way and paths of holiness, having glorious triumphs in her life, and now thanks God somebody showed up carnality, ploughed close and dug deep, and discovered to her the "old man" of sin.

Now the conclusion: Suppose this woman had died professing, but not possessing the experience; would she not have been lost?

Would not the ministry that had not been rugged enough and had encouraged her to think she was all right and perhaps, as some say, had talked with her and quieted her fears, been a sharer in the blame, if not wholly responsible?

May our ministry be tender, yea, more so than ever, but let it have enough fire to burn out dross, sufficient glory to discover deadness and dryness, and be rugged enough to stir carnality and awaken every soul not really filled with the Holy Ghost.

ALONE

Dr. G. D. Watson

It is human to stand with the crowd; it is divine to stand alone. It is manlike to follow the people, to drift with the tide; it is godlike to follow a principle, to stem the tide.

It is natural to compromise conscience and follow the social and religious fashion for the sake of gain or pleasure; it is divine to sacrifice both on the altar of truth and duty.

"No man stood with me, but all men forsook me," wrote the battle-scarred apostle in describing his first appearance before Nero to answer for his life for believing and teaching contrary to the Roman world.

Noah built and voyaged alone. His neighbors laughed at his strangeness, and perished in style.

Abraham wandered and worshiped alone. Sodomites smiled at the simple shepherd, followed the fashion, and fed the flames.

Daniel dined and prayed alone. Elijah sacrificed and witnessed alone. Jeremiah prophesied and wept alone. Jesus loved and died alone.