

The Reality of Manifestations

by John Fletcher

John Fletcher explores the reality of spiritual manifestations and the necessity of spiritual senses for believers to perceive divine truths.

Scripture: Psalm 34:8, Matthew 5:8, John 3:3, Romans 8:16, 1 Corinthians 2:14, 2 Corinthians 4:4, Ephesians 1:18, Philippians 1:9, Hebrews 5:14, Revelation 3:18

Topics: "Spiritual Senses", "Divine Manifestation"

Description

John Fletcher emphasizes that the Lord Jesus Christ desires to manifest Himself to all born-again believers in a spiritual manner, which is essential for experiencing the fullness of His salvation. He argues that spiritual senses, akin to physical senses, are necessary for perceiving divine truths and that these senses are awakened in those who are regenerated. Fletcher supports his claims with scriptural evidence, asserting that the ability to discern spiritual realities is a gift from God to His followers. He warns against the dangers of being spiritually blind and encourages believers to seek a deeper relationship with Christ through these spiritual senses. Ultimately, Fletcher's message is a call to recognize and cultivate the spiritual faculties that allow for a genuine experience of God's presence.

Transcript

I am of the firm opinion that the Lord Jesus Christ seeks to manifest Himself to all born-again believers, in this life. Realising, however, that an opening sentence of this kind may come as a complete surprise to the reader, I ask only that you will give me time to explain myself. For, although this belief may be thought, by some, to be based upon mere enthusiasm, I am convinced that-for purposes which are worthy of His wisdom-our Saviour desires to reveal Himself to all of His sincere followers, in a divinely spiritual way, sooner or later.

Not only do I believe that this teaching is true, but also I am sure that it is scriptural, rational, and of the greatest importance. Because of this, I am sitting down to write on this profound subject at some length. By so doing, I shall give you a fair opportunity of seeing my error (if I am wrong), or encouraging you (if I am right) in seeking that which I esteem to be the most invaluable of all blessings-revelations of Christ to one's personal soul, productive of the experimental knowledge of Him, and the present enjoyment of His salvation.

Even as an architect cannot arrange for the design and erection of a palace unless he is first presented with a piece of land to build upon, so I shall not be able to establish my doctrine unless I am allowed to

prove the existence of the senses by which our Lord manifests Himself. The kind of revelation which I am contending for is not physical or psychical; it is spiritual. If man is to behold manifestations which are wholly divine, he must be granted spiritual senses. Some will question as to whether there are any senses other than those human ones which are associated with sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch. That is why, in this first chapter, I shall seek to prove - from the joint testimony of Scripture, the Church, and Reason-that spiritual senses are given to regenerate souls. Further, I hope to prove to you that such senses are, and have been, regularly exercised by Christians in every century.

SCRIPTURAL TESTIMONY

The scriptures inform us that Adam lost the experimental knowledge of God by the Fall. His foolish attempt to hide himself from his Creator, whose eyes are in every place, evidences the total blindness of his understanding. The same veil of unbelief, which hid God from his mind, was drawn over his heart and over all of his spiritual senses. He died the death, the moral spiritual death, in consequence of which the corruptible body sinks into the grave, and the unregenerate soul into hell.

In this deplorable state Adam begat his children. We, like him, are not only void of the life of God, but alienated from it through the ignorance that is in us. Therefore, although we are possessed of the same animal and rational life which Adam retained after the commission of his sin, yet we are-by nature-utter strangers to the holiness and bliss he enjoyed in his original state of innocence. Though we have, in common with beasts, bodily organs of sight, hearing, tasting, smelling, and feeling, adapted to outward objects; though we enjoy, in common with devils, the faculty of reasoning upon natural truths, and mathematical propositions, yet we do not understand supernatural and divine things. Notwithstanding all our speculations about them, we can neither see nor taste them truly, unless we are risen with Christ and taught of God. We may, indeed, speak and write about them, as the blind may speak of colours, and the deaf dispute of sounds, but it is all guesswork, hearsay, and mere conjecture. The things of the Spirit of God can be discovered only by spiritual internal senses, which are, with regard to the spiritual world, what our external senses are with regard to the material world. They are the only means by which a fellowship between Christ and our souls can be opened and maintained.

The exercise of these senses is peculiar to those who are born of God. They belong to what the apostles call the new man, the inward man, the new creature, the hidden man of the heart. In believers, this hidden man is awakened and raised from the dead, by the power of Christ's resurrection. Christ is his life, the Spirit of God is his spirit, prayer (or praise) his breath, holiness his health, and love his element. We read of his hunger and thirst, food and drink, garment and habitation, armour and conflicts, pain and pleasure, fainting and reviving, growing, walking, and working. All this supposes senses, and the more these senses are quickened by God, and exercised by the new-born soul, the clearer and stronger is his perception of divine things.

On the other hand, in unbelievers the inward man is deaf, blind, naked, asleep, and past feeling; yea, dead in trespasses and sins; and of course, as incapable of perceiving spiritual things, as a person in a deep sleep, or a dead man of discovering outward objects. St. Paul's language to him, is 'Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light'. Paul described him as being a natural man : one who has no higher life than his parents conveyed to him by natural generation-one who follows the dictates of his own sensual soul, and is neither born of God, nor led by the Spirit of God. 'The natural man' wrote the Apostle 'receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him : neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.' He has no sense properly exercised for

this kind of discernment, his `eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.'

The reverse of the natural man is the spiritual man, so called because God has revealed spiritual things to him by his Spirit, who is now in him a principle of spiritual and eternal life. `The spiritual man' wrote the Apostle judgeth (that is discerneth) all things, yet he himself is discerned of no man.' The high estate he is in can no more be discerned by the natural man, than the condition of the natural man can be discerned by a brute.

St. Paul not only described the spiritual man, but wrote particularly of his internal, moral senses; he believed that mature believers, by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.(Hebrews 5 :14-`have their spiritual faculties carefully trained' -Weymouth) He prayed that the love of the Philippians `may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all sense or feeling. '(Although the author has freely rendered Philippians 1: 9 here, his choice of words is more close to the original than the 1611 version) The Scriptures constantly mention, or allude to, one or other of these spiritual senses; allow me to present some examples

1. Let us begin with SIGHT : St. Paul prayed that the eyes of his converts might be enlightened; `that you might know what is the hope of His calling.' He reminded them that Christ had been `evidently set forth crucified' before their eyes. He assured them, that `the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not' the gospel, and declared that his commission was to open the eyes of the Gentiles, `and to turn them from darkness to light.' Abraham saw Christ's day, and was glad. Moses persevered, as seeing Him who is invisible. David prayed `Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.' Our Lord remarked that the heart of unbelievers `is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted.' He counselled the Laodiceans to `anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see'; He declared that `the world cannot receive' the Spirit of truth `because it seeth Him not'; that the things which belong to peace are hidden from the eyes of an unbeliever; and that the pure in heart `shall see God'. John testified that the man who does evil `bath not seen God', and that `darkness hath blinded the eyes' of the man who does not love his brother. The eyes referred to are those with which believers see the salvation of God; they are so distinct from those of the body, that when our Lord opened them in Paul's soul, He caused scales to grow over his bodily eyes. Also, no doubt, when Christ gave outward sight to the blind, it was chiefly to convince the world that He is the One who can say to blind sinners `Receive your sight; see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living; look unto Me, and be ye saved.'

2. Let us now consider the sense of HEARING. If you do not allow for the possibility of spiritual hearing, what do you make of our Lord's repeated caution `He that hath ears to hear, let him hear'? Or what can be the meaning of the following scriptures : `Hear now this, O foolish people ... which have ears, and hear not'; `Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears'; `Ye cannot hear my word-ye are of your father the devil.... He that is of God, heareth God's words : ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God'? Can it be supposed that our Lord spake of outward hearing, when He said `The hour cometh, and now is when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God'; `My sheep hear my voice'; `every man, therefore, that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me'? Do not all sinners stand spiritually in need of Christ's powerful 'Ephphatha! Be opened!'? Is a man truly converted, if he cannot witness with Isaiah `the Lord wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned'; or say with the Psalmist `mine ears hast thou opened'? Had not the believers at Ephesus heard Christ, and been `taught of him'?; when

St. Paul was caught up into the third heaven, did he not hear words unspeakable? And, far from thinking spiritual hearing absurd, or impossible, did Paul not question whether he was not then out of the body? And does not St. John positively declare, that he was in the spirit, when he heard Jesus say 'I am the first and the last'?

3. The sense of SMELL*. How void of meaning are the following passages, if they do not allude to that sense which is intended for the reception (what the barrenness of human language compels me to call) spiritual perfumes: 'How much better ... is the smell of thine ointments than all spices ... the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon'; 'All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia'; 'Because of the savour of thy good ointments, thy name is as ointment poured forth.' (*The introduction of this point may seem improper to a sensitive modern reader. However, the reality of divine fragrance can not be denied by those who have had close contacts with the Lord)

4. As to the sense of TASTE, if believers have not a spiritual faculty of tasting divine things, what delusion must they be under when they read 'His fruit was sweet to my taste' or 'how sweet are Thy words unto my taste! Yea, they are sweeter than honey to my mouth'? On the other hand, how faithfully can they speak in this way, if they have themselves tasted the heavenly gift, and the good word of God and, as new born babes, have begun to desire the sincere milk of that Word! Surely, if they eat of the flesh of the Son of God, drink of His blood, and taste that the Lord is gracious, they have a right to testify, that 'His love is better than wine', and to invite those who 'hunger and thirst after righteousness' to 'taste that the Lord is good', so that they also may be satisfied with His goodness and mercy.

5. Last of all, we must not forget FEELING; for if we are more than stoics in religion, if we have but one degree more of devotion than the marble statues which adorn our churches, we should have, I think, some feeling of our unworthiness, some sense of God's majesty. Christ's tender heart was pierced to atone for, and to remove the hardness of, ours. God has promised to take from us the heart of stone, and to give us a heart of flesh, a broken and a contrite heart, the sacrifice of which He will not despise. King Josiah was praised because his heart was tender. The conversion of the three thousand, on the day of Pentecost, began by their being pricked in their hearts. We are directed to feel after God, if happily we may find Him. Our Lord Himself is not ashamed to be touched, in heaven, with a feeling of our infirmities. And Paul intimates that the highest degree of stubbornness and apostacy is to be past feeling, and to have our conscience seared as with a hot iron.

I hope that you will not attempt to set aside these plain passages by saying that they are unfit to support a doctrine, since they contain only empty metaphors and amount to nothing. This would be pouring the greatest contempt on the intrinsic clarity of the Word of God, the integrity of the sacred writers, and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit who inspired them. Just as certainly as there is a spiritual life, there are senses which are calculated for the display and enjoyment of it; and these senses exist no more in metaphor than the life which exerts itself by them. Our Lord settled the point when he declared to Nicodemus that no man can see the kingdom of God, the kingdom of grace here, and of the glory hereafter, except he first be born of God-born of the Spirit; just as no child can see this world, except he be first born of a woman-born of the flesh. To put it another way, a regenerate soul has its spiritual senses opened, and made capable of discerning what belongs to the spiritual world, in the same way that a newly born infant has his natural sense unlocked, and begins to see, hear, and taste what belongs to that material world into which he is entering.

THE CHURCH'S TESTIMONY

These declarations of the Lord, His Prophets and Apostles, need no confirmation. Nevertheless, to shew you that I do not mistake their meaning, I shall add to them the testimony of the English Church. She agrees strictly with the Scriptures and also makes frequent mention of spiritual sensations; and as you know, sensations necessarily suppose senses. For example, in the Book of Common Prayer (in the section for Thanksgivings) we are invited to pray that God will 'give us a due sense' of all of His mercies, and above all else for His 'inestimable love in the redemption of the world, by our Lord Jesus Christ.' Also, in the same book (in the Office for the Visitation of the Sick) the sufferer is expected to 'know and feel that there is no other Name under heaven' than that of Jesus, whereby he can receive health and salvation. The church affirms in the Communion Service that true penitents 'feel the burden of their sins intolerable', and in the 17th Article of Religion we are assured that godly persons 'feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ'. Further, in the Book of Homilies it is said that 'the Lord speaks presently to us in the Scriptures, to the great and endless comfort of all that have any feeling of God in them at all'; that 'godly men felt, inwardly, the Holy Ghost inflaming their hearts with the fear and love of God, and that they are miserable wretches, who have no feeling of God within them at all'; that 'if we feel the heavy burden of our sins pressing our souls and tormenting us with the fear of death, hell, and damnation, we must steadfastly behold Christ crucified, with the eyes of our heart'; and that 'true faith is not in the mouth and outward profession only, but liveth and stirreth in the heart, and if we feel and perceive such a faith in us, we must rejoice'; that 'correction, though painful, bringeth with it a taste of God's goodness'; that 'if, after contrition, we feel our consciences at peace with God, through the remission of our sin, it is God who worketh that great miracle in us'; that 'as this knowledge and feeling is not in ourselves, and, as by ourselves, it is not possible to come by it, the Lord would give us grace to know these things, and feel them in our hearts'; and that 'God would assist us with his Holy Spirit, that we may hearken to the voice of the good Shepherd.'

If these quotations are not sufficient, recall that in the Order for Evening Prayer the Church asks continually that the Lord 'lighten our darkness' and in the Litany she prays to be delivered from all 'blindness of heart'.

If I did not think the testimony of our blessed Reformers, founded upon that of the sacred writers, of sufficient weight to turn the scale of your sentiments, I could throw in the declarations of many ancient Divines. Permit me to quote from two or three only: St. Cyril, in the 13th Book of his Treasure, affirms that 'men know that Jesus is the Lord by the Holy Ghost, in the way that they who taste honey know that it is sweet, even by its proper quality.' Dr. Smith of Queen's College, Cambridge, in his Select Discourses, observes-after Plotinus - that 'God is best discerned by an intellectual touch from Him.' 'We must' says he 'see with our eyes, or-to use John's words-we must hear with our ears, and our hands must handle the Word of Life, for the soul hath its senses as well as the body.' And Bishop Hopkins, in his treatise on the New Birth, accounts for the papist denial of the knowledge of salvation by saying 'It is no wonder that they who will not trust their natural senses in the doctrine of transubstantiation should not trust their spiritual ones in the doctrine of assurance.'

THE TESTIMONY OF REASON

However, instead of proving the point by multiplying quotations, let me intreat you to weigh the following observations in the balance of Reason

1. Do not all intelligent people grant that there is such a thing as moral sense in the world, and that to be utterly void of it, is to be altogether unfit for social life? If you had given a friend the greatest proofs of your

love, would not he be inexcusable, if he felt no gratitude, and had no sense of your kindness? Now, if moral sense and feeling are universally allowed, between men in civil life, why should it appear incredible, or irrational, that there should be such a thing between God and man, in the divine life?

2. If material objects cannot be perceived by man in his present state, except by means of one or other of his bodily senses; by a parity of reason, spiritual objects cannot be discovered, but through one or other of the senses which belong to the inward man. Since God is Spirit, He cannot be worshipped in truth, unless He be known in spirit. You may as soon imagine how a blind man (by reasoning on what he feels or tastes) can get true ideas of light and colours, as how one who has no spiritual senses opened can (by all his reasoning and guessing) attain an experimental knowledge of the invisible God. Thus, from the joint testimony of Scripture, of our Church, and of Reason, it seems to me that spiritual senses are a blessed reality.

I have spent so much time in proving the existence of these senses for two reasons. The first reason is because they are of infinite use in the Christian religion; saving faith cannot continue to exist or act without them. If the biblical definition of faith is correct; if it is 'the substance (or subsistence) of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen', it must be a principle of spiritual life, more or less, attended with the exercise of these senses; according to the poetic and evangelical lines of Dr. Young

'My heart awake,

Feel the great truths : to feel is to be fired,

And to believe, Lorenzo, is to feel.'

Until those who are only merely churchgoers see the necessity of believing in this manner, they will trust in but a refined form of godliness. They may add to the confidence of the antinomians* the high profession of the foolish virgins; they may even crown their partial assent to the truths of the gospel with the zeal of pharisees (or the regularity of moralists!), but they still stop short of the new creation, the new birth-the life of God in the soul of man. In fact, it is worse than this, for they stumble at some of the most important truths of Christianity when they presume that the discoveries which sound believers have of Christ, and of the spiritual world, are the delusions of enthusiasm, or extraordinary favours which they can j very well do without! So, even whilst they allow the power of godliness in others, nominal churchgoers remain satisfied without experiencing divine blessing themselves. (*Antinomians are professing Christians who live as if moral laws are not binding upon them.)

The second reason why I have spent so much time proving the existence of spiritual senses is because the remaining chapters of this book are based upon a belief in them. If, therefore, you are now as convinced as I am that spiritual senses are opened in every new-born soul, you will be more easily able to believe that Christ can, and does, manifest Himself by that proper means. That being the case, my remaining chapters on divine manifestations will meet with a less prejudiced reader!

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-fletcher/the-reality-of-manifestations/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net