

Beware of Gimmicks

Introduction

The essence of the Christian walk is to be filled with the Spirit and focusing completely on Christ. We walk by faith and this faith is directed at apprehending Christ, whom we cannot see or touch but who is vital to everything in our life.

Thus we do the things that please Christ. We obey the law of Christ. We worship Christ. We put on Christ. Everything is centred on the Lord.

The fight in the battle of spiritual warfare is all about avoiding being distracted from centring on Christ; even in the smallest detail. The Devil is less concerned with getting us to sin as he is getting us away from Christ. Temptations are based upon stopping us looking to Jesus and looking at something else.

Now the Devil uses many things in the world, and many servants in different walks of life, in his strategies to getting us distracted. The cleverness of his plans are that he often uses religious people and things or things that claim to be Biblical but are not. Christians ought to be easily able to spot demonic temptations that are worldly, venal and wicked, so the Devil uses attractions that claim to be Biblical or religious.

The history of the church involves many seasons whereby the church focused upon something other than Christ and went down a wrong path. This is called deception, and it is the Devil's chief weapon.

So I emphasise to you that your chief responsibility is to stay centred on Christ and eschew everything else. This does not mean avoiding your other responsibilities; if you are focused on Christ you will also fulfil these, such as your responsibility to your family. Concentrating on obeying Christ and doing his will automatically includes fulfilling all his commandments.

Now, to help you understand the subtlety of distractions, I will itemise some of the Christian fads that I have seen come and go in my lifetime. These often include supposed Christian authors that had a best-seller book and were often based on anecdotal evidence rather than Scripture.

What is a gimmick?

The origin of this word derives from the 1920s in America. It is of unknown origin but is possibly an anagram of *magic*, the original sense being a piece of magicians' apparatus.

It is formally defined as a trick or device intended to attract attention, publicity, or trade.

In Christian circles a gimmick could be described as something put forward to draw attention to a ministry or church that had no Biblical validity but still attracted people to accept what was being sold by a preacher.

Ecclesiastical gimmicks can take many forms. They can be populist doctrines, promises of benefiting in some way, something to boost self-esteem and so on.

In Medieval times the gimmick that started the Reformation was the selling of indulgences to gullible people by travelling monks like Tetzels that were no better than itinerant footpads.¹ As with many modern church gimmicks, this preyed upon uninformed, weak, superstitious people that wanted divine approval for themselves or a loved one.

These indulgences were a means used by the Roman Catholic Church to get money to spend on worldly things, like decorations for buildings or new building projects to glorify a pope. They were a grant by the pope for the remission of the temporal punishment in purgatory still due for sins after absolution. Thus poor people would pay hard-earned money to release relatives from further suffering in Purgatory. Such were a gimmick that had no Biblical value but claimed to have spiritual power. This is what modern church gimmicks are: something with no Biblical value but claims to have spiritual power to bless a person. They attract the gullible.

Meaningless repetitive chants

Example by: Merlin Carothers; *From Prison to Praise; Power in Praise*.

For a time in the 1970s there was a teaching by Merlin Carothers that the secret of a powerful, fulfilling Christian life was to say words of praise all the time. This was used like a magic spell or an incantation. Whatever your problem, you simply spoke 'praise the Lord' and the problem would go away. For example, if you had a bad tooth you simply said 'praise the Lord' a few times and the toothache would stop. If you needed money, a few chants and the money would appear.

Many people took this up and stopped doing rational things, like studying the Bible to ascertain God's will, or seeking the counsel of elders to alleviate a problem. Instead they started shouting 'praise the Lord' a few times and expected their life to be supercharged. Of course, despite Carothers' anecdotal claims of miracles and healings, little happened to most people. Within a few years Carothers had disappeared off the mainstream scene and the movement he created fizzled out like so many others, though his books still sold.

Carothers also espoused a divination type of attitude to ascertaining the will of God, akin to studying the entrails of animals. Everything in life, from a piece of soggy toast, a flat tyre, a lost car-parking space or headache, is special sign from God to the believer. This is taking divine sovereignty into the realm of fatalism. It turns the universe into a focus upon the self; nothing happens in life except in virtue of a personal, man-centred link. This is what pagans do when cosmic events have to be interpreted as the effects of the gods on human existence that need to be appeased by sacrifice.

In Carothers' case it is the sacrifice of praise that makes all things well. The incident, e.g. soggy toast, must be examined to determine the will of God. To avert the harmful effects of an incident (illness, poverty, affliction) one simply incants the formula, 'praise the Lord'. What is happening here is that the formula stops God from pouring out the affliction because he has been appeased by the chant. In the terms of Carothers, the believer has learned his lesson of humility and submission to God's will, therefore God can call off the

¹ A highwayman operating on foot rather than riding a horse.

affliction. It is equivalent to a pagan manipulating the divinity by using the right magic words or sacrifice.

This is nothing but magic and occultism; in fact it is an exposition of all the forms of occultism: magic, spiritualism and divination.

Simple Biblical teaching does not tell us to do this but has very practical advice. It tells us to **flee** from sin and temptation (1 Cor 6:18, 10:14; 1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 2:22). It tells us to **resist** the Devil and his works (Jm 4:7). We must **pursue** peace (Heb 12:13). It tells us to **strive** to do good (Acts 24:16; Heb 12:4). It tells us to **avoid** doing evil but to do good (Rm 12:9; 1 Pt 3:11). We must **stop speaking** evil things (1 Pt 3:10). We must be **patient** in well doing and **longsuffering** in afflictions (Rm 12:12; Gal 5:22). We must **press on** in tribulation (Phil 3:12, 14). We must even thank God for our problems instead of seeking magical ways out of them (1 Thess 5:18).

These are all very active things to live a Christian life. We are not passive and merely saying certain phrases to resolve problems; we do the right things and trust in God. God does not do our repenting for us or live by faith for us; he expects us to get on with it, he has given us every spiritual blessing already in Christ (Eph 1:3).

Objection

Are we not commanded to praise the Lord at all times?

We are commanded to give thanks for all things (Eph 5:20; 1 Thess 5:18) and to test all things (1Thess 5:21). We are to do all in the name of the Lord Jesus (Col 3:17). There is no verse telling us to 'praise the Lord at all times'.

In fact, the term 'praise the Lord' is an Old Covenant expression. It never occurs in the NT except once when quoting the OT (Rm 15:11, from Ps 117:1 LXX). It occurs frequently in the OT and especially in the Psalms.

Indeed, the word 'praise' is mostly used of men and not God in the NT. It is only used of God eight times and two of those are OT quotes.

The believer should worship God constantly and this should be done in the secret places of the heart (Rm 12:1; 1 Pt 2:5). The basis of this worship is thanksgiving for salvation.

What the objector has in mind is:

Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. Heb 13:15

Firstly, this is not a command to say a certain set of words, such as 'praise the Lord' in order to expect some blessing. In fact, the reverse is true; we offer the sacrifice of praise to God in thanksgiving for something he has already done.

The sacrifice of praise to God in other texts refers to singing (Jer 33:11; 1 Pt 2:5); but it also refers to daily service (Rm 12:1) and giving to the needy (Phil 4:18). Our sacrifice of praise is doing God's will.

The Christian should be continually worshipping God for who he is and continually giving thanks for what he has done. There is nothing wrong in saying praise the Lord in thankfulness and worship.

The problem with the Carothers' doctrine is the idea of it being a magical incantation that secures blessing and overcomes problems. The Christian accepts problems as the will of God and gives thanks for them (Eph 5:20; 1 Thess 5:18). If hard pressed, the believer prays to God for help and power to overcome. There is no magical spell that guarantees wiping problems away immediately and guaranteeing blessing.

Clearly the early church had no idea about the Carothers' doctrine when facing the persecution of the lions and other wild beasts. They went through the fire without conjuring up spells to avoid it.

Astronomical confluence

From time to time the heavens display certain combinations that gullible people have historically found auspicious. Such would include eclipses of the sun and moon; the alignment of certain planets in the solar system; passing comets; supernovae and suchlike.

In the case of planetary alignment, virtually every time this occurs there is a flurry of supposed Christian teachers who start doomsday preaching; some even start whole movements. What should give believers pause is that secular and pagan leaders preach a very similar message.

I have lost count of the times this has happened in my lifetime. Every time it has appeared I have warned people not to fall for it and ignore the speculations. We do not determine our lives by the planets or stars but by the word of God.

Why do church folk get worried when an approaching comet is said to threaten the Earth? The Bible is very clear that the world will end when Christ appears in the heavens with the dead saints and brings this age to a close (1 Thess 4:16-17; 2 Thess 1:7-8; 2 Pt 3:10; Rev 1:7). The end is not brought about by a comet. Yet time after time people get frightened by the claims of charlatans. It is just a gimmick to get attention.

Claimed resurrection experiences

Another fad that occurs occasionally is some person appears on the church scene claiming to have died in some experience, gone to heaven but was then resurrected and lived to tell what they saw.

Sometimes this is simply a near death experience on a hospital operating table; in other cases it is claimed that someone actually did die and was resurrected by some miracle. Either way, the message they preach concerns what they saw in heaven, usually pertaining to future events. I have seen this recur many times and I have never been interested in what they said.

We do not need the claimed revelation of some unknown, unqualified individual claiming visions of heaven. We have the word of God which is fully sufficient to give us all the information we need. **'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work', 2 Tim 3:16-17.**

When the apostle Paul really did get translated into heaven, he did not explain what he saw; in fact he said it was not lawful for him to reveal it (2 Cor 12:4). What he did was use

this experience to show his need of grace in weakness. Paul used this experience in a humble way. Modern exponents use it to claim that they have higher knowledge than mere mortals like us and that they are special. In every case, the message gradually fades away and the person vanished from sight.

This is just another gimmick to capture gullible people.

Chasing the dragon

Example by: Jackie Pullinger; *Chasing the dragon*.

Jackie Pullinger is a Charismatic missionary to Hong Kong (Kowloon Walled City) since 1966 where she works amongst drug addicts smoking opium and other substances ('chasing the dragon').

She clearly meant well but her book, published in 1980, which became a Christian best-seller, advocated an entirely false message of the Gospel.

Ministering amongst clearly irrational drug addicts she had little success in preaching a rational Gospel based on truth. So she turned to the Charismatic experience and persuaded these same addicts to be baptised in the Spirit, whereby they had a mystical experience – which Pullinger interpreted as being saved. These people had no conviction of sin, exhibited no repentance from sin or faith in Jesus Christ but manifested the effects of being baptised in the Spirit (e.g. speaking in tongues or falling over).

Pullinger clearly did not understand that pagans regularly have a similar mystical experience and also speak in tongues and fall over. Such signs mean nothing whatsoever and are no evidence of true faith. Nowhere in the Bible are such things indicative of conversion.

Like many Pentecostal and Charismatic works all the evidence in her book is anecdotal stories and no doctrine. This is no way to establish a ministry.

I once had lunch with a famous Baptist church leader who had gone over to Hong Kong to witness her work. She confessed to him that she lamented that her methods were wrong and lacked theological basis – but continued nevertheless because they worked. He confirmed to her that the methods were wrong but I think that his statements fell short of a proper admonition.

This happens far too often when a minister becomes famous and seems to do good works but their methods are all wrong. Even good people forgive the errors because the results are strong (i.e. many members in the congregation). This, in itself, is wrong. Practical success does not guarantee truth and orthodoxy. Many successful works are based on evil teachings.

My propositions on dealing with drug-affected people:

- You cannot preach the Gospel rationally to a drugged up person. The truth has to be experienced in the conscious mind before it can take hold of the heart. Drugged up people cannot respond to truth. 'How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? ... So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.' (Rm 10:14-17).

- You can only talk to a drug abuser when they are clean and sober, even if this is only for a short period. They have to understand the basic truth of the Gospel in their minds before the heart can approve it. This is not Sandemanianism. It is not an intellectual Gospel. It is not understanding a theological system first. It is merely understanding the basic facts of salvation: who Jesus is; what he did; what sin is; what salvation is; what faith is; what conversion is and the need to believe in and confess Christ.
- Don't accept the conversion of a drug abuser lightly. In my experience addicts of all sorts will claim to be a believer in order to gain: trust; get money; get food or get more of their poison. You need to test the faith of such people over time before you accept that their conversion is genuine. Do not baptise such folk too quickly. I have seen an addict appear to be godly for months on end, receiving all sorts of help and affirmation, only to fall back into addiction, apostatise and die.
- Be strong regarding falling back. Demand that converts never return to their drug addictions. Enforce that with discipline. If they return to drugs, after a prior warning, they must be dismissed from the fellowship. If they genuinely get clean, receive them with love after testing.

Alpha, of course

Example by: Nicky Gumbel, *The Alpha Course*.

This is a similar story to Pullinger.

Anglican Nicky Gumbel took over an introductory evangelistic course and rewrote it based upon certain factors. It highlighted

- An informal approach to evangelism with dumbed-down teaching.
- A social approach to evangelising centred around a communal meal and love bombing.
- A Charismatic Gospel.
- The course culminated in a weekend away where members are encouraged to be baptised in the Spirit.

The problem is that the Gospel preached is shockingly superficial. It has no emphasis on sin or eternal punishment and merely focuses on what Jesus can do for you. 'Converts' usually have no experience of conviction of sin or even understand what sin is. They also have little understanding about the work and ministry of Christ and many show no understanding of Christ as Lord.

As a result the testimonies, of which there are very many published in magazines and books, show very little evidence of genuine salvation; indeed some are downright disturbing. Thus it is no surprise that investigative journalists have been through the whole process to write a story, were baptised in the Spirit and claimed to be Christians, but remained firm atheists and agnostics and said so in their pieces.

Falling over in a mystical experience is no evidence of true conversion to Christ. The idea that generating a mystical trance by manipulating social circumstances to be increasingly passive, ethereal and numinous, is nothing to do with Christianity at all but is cultic and occult.

The Shouters

Example by: Witness Lee; *The Stream* journal.

The Shouters began as a Chinese sect (Huhan Pai) and were so called as members engaged in public shouting as part of their worship. There is a Chinese sect, a South Korean sect and an offshoot in America.

The most well-known culprit is the cult led by Witness Lee, a disciple of Watchman Nee, who launched his sect in Los Angeles after being active in China and Taiwan. He publishes his errors in his journal '*The Stream*'. Lee's church is titled 'The Church in Los Angeles'. Many disgruntled Brethren and 'Jesus People' converts joined Lee because of his connection to Watchman Nee.

Three great errors of this sect are to formularise the Lord's Prayer, the means of conversion and the means of overcoming problems (in a similar way to Carothers).

- The Shouters rewrote the Lord's Prayer to read simply, '*Oh, Lord Jesus*'; followers shout the phrase while stamping their feet in unison. This is shouted repetitively and exuberantly.
- To be saved one must shout '*Oh, Lord Jesus*'. Lee appeals to Old and New Testament references to support this practice.
- Christian victory is not gained by understanding doctrine, discipline or prayer but by four words of praise. They repeat in unison, either spoken, sung, or shouted: '*O Lord, Amen, Hallelujah!*'.

There are many other heresies in this group, including authoritarianism, elitism and brainwashing, but these are the gimmicks that are applicable in this paper.

Lee, like all other cultists, expects his members to forget everything they have previously learned and submit entirely to his teaching – thus gaining brainwashed servants. Needless to say that the aforementioned formula phrases have no Biblical provenance. In fact it is blasphemous to contradict the direction of the Lord himself and replace the Lord's Prayer with a chant.

Like Carothers, getting victory over problems and circumstances is not achieved by chanting a phrase, but by understanding doctrine, by faith, by being filled with the Spirit, and by discipline in grace. Again this is a form of magic that is alien to true Christianity.

Messianic Christianity

Example by: multiple books and preachers.

The gimmick in this case is Israel and Jews. Bless Israel and all will go well with you; contend against Israel and you are cursed.

The point of this Judaising doctrine is to get Christians to lose their focus on Christ and his commands and instead centre one's life on supporting Israel and all things Jewish. It was a plan adopted by Zionists in the late 19th century to develop a rogue theology to get the churches to support the idea of an Israeli homeland and support Jews in general that were gaining more and more power far beyond their relative position in the populations of the West. Since two NT books specifically argue against Judaising tendencies, plus several

chapters of other books, it is amazing that any Christians allowed themselves to be fooled by this doctrine.

Jewish bankers like Samuel Untermyer took hold of an already emerging unorthodox theology produced by a heretical, scandalous church in London² based on the ideas of Jesuits like Ribera and Lacunza. John Darby ran with this system,³ which began as a prophetic doctrine but merged into a whole new theology later called Dispensationalism. Darby, an East India Company operative, was used by Jewish financiers to promote this theology in America in multiple preaching tours. Jewish bankers then got a charlatan and convicted criminal named Cyrus Scofield to summarise this theology in annotations in a new study Bible just as the old Geneva Bible had explanatory notes. This became a best-seller.

Through propaganda and media manipulation, the new unorthodox theology took hold of churches and within a few decades became the majority theological position in America. This secured what the Jewish financiers wanted: the support of the moral majority in America for Israeli objectives.

This is not conjecture; the facts of history prove this but many Jews have openly stated that they deliberately hijacked the churches with a fake theology to support their plans.

The basis of Dispensationalism is the separation of the Jews and the church in God's plans with Jews being God's priority (this is unequivocally denied in the NT, which Dispensationalists downplay). The Jews are the people of God and the church is a temporary stopgap in God's plans. Thus the kingdom is Jewish and the focus of God's end times plan is Israel, not the church. The NT flatly condemns this theology in open statements like: Matt 8:11-12, 21:43-44; Rm 10:12; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11. Indeed, Jews are condemned in many places (Matt 23:31-33, 37; Lk 11:48-51; Acts 2:23-24, 3:14-15, 5:30, 7:52; Rm 11:28; 1 Thess 2:14-15). The OT promises originally given to Israelites under the Old Covenant, are now applied to the church instead, the kingdom having been removed from Israel (Matt 21:43; 1 Cor 3:17; 2 Tim 1:9; Titus 2:14; 1 Pt 1:2, 2:5, 9-10; Rev 1:6, 5:10).

Dispensationalism, and the subsidiary messianic theologies that stem from it,⁴ are in open defiance and contradiction to clear statements in the NT from both Christ and the apostles.

The ideas that Jews are still the chosen people of God and that they have the blessing and favour of God without being converted by grace, or that Israel as a fleshly nation is blessed by God, are blatant lies foisted on the church to enable the spread of Zionism and its objectives for world rule.

Individual Jews can be converted, as Paul argues in Romans, but only by grace and accepting the Gospel of Christ. They are saved just as anyone else is saved. Jews have no special favour with God in the plan of salvation at all. Israel is to be judged just like any other nation and condemned for its illegal actions, multiple war crimes and human rights abuses. Indeed, it is the command of God to expose such wickedness (Eph 5:11). Supporting Israel when it commits crimes is sin.

² The Catholic Apostolic Church where Edward Irving was a teacher. This grew increasingly authoritarian, Charismatic and heretical and in the end collapsed in scandal.

³ Darby's First paper on Prophecy, or Prophetic No. 1 in Darby's collected writings, quotes Lacunza as well as the 'Morning Watch' (the Catholic Apostolic journal).

⁴ Messianic Christianity, Christian Zionism, the Jewish Root Movement.

Name it and claim it

Example by: multiple Word of Faith leaders: including Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, Paul (David) Yonggi Cho and Benny Hinn.

Word of Faith, and its sources, are essentially a paganising of Christianity. They are a syncretism of the occult and the Bible. Such nonsense stems back to PP Quimby and the fascination of many Victorian preachers with occultism. Quimby openly mangled together Eastern mysticism, Mesmerism and occultism (especially magic) with Christian concepts, resulting in non-Christian doctrines. His ideas gave birth to multiple groups and movements including Christian Science.

The essence of Word of Faith preachers is selfishness and man-centredness. It takes all the attention away from Christ and puts man in the centre of their doctrines and practices. Copeland has even said that man can command God who must do his bidding (if man fulfils the right conditions, namely faith and assertiveness).

It is pointless going through all the many heresies and aberrations of this group, which I have itemised elsewhere. Needless to say that the leaders (TV evangelists) are not Christians in any sense of the word. The leaders are charlatans who are mostly after your money; the doctrines are demonic and selfish and the results are shocking (distracted, depressed, demoralised people).

In very simple terms, the main gimmick is that faith can claim anything if it is true faith expressed with authority ('name it and claim it'). This leads to a prosperity Gospel; that is, a Gospel promise that you can have anything you want by virtue of your faith. Thus you should have victory over sin, healing of your ailments and financial security – if you have the right faith.

Of course, most of the members do not experience these things and they are told it is because of their lack of faith or their lack of the right kind of faith. The leaders, however, do not get rich by faith but by lying to congregants and taking their money on false pretences. They steal by sheer force of personality. Ignoring Jesus' statements about the rich, these leaders are fabulously wealthy with multiple mansions, boats, aircraft and limousines. Copeland even has his own airfield for multiple jets.

What is sickening to see is simple folk with sick children who give all their money to such preachers in the hope of healing, and get bankrupted, only to see their kid still sick and dying – but now they have no money to help them. For this sacrifice they are blamed for having no faith.

This is a truly sick and demonic system that pretends to be a church.

Binding demons

The whole spiritual warfare programme of Charismatics and Pentecostals is filled with multiple gimmicks and some ploys that are stark raving mad. Here I will discuss just one; binding spirits.

The teaching is that in order to be blessed and to have protection in any given circumstance, you first need to bind the spirits, or demons, to ensure that you have liberty to pray, worship etc.

Thus you have Charismatics authoritatively casting out spirits in a room before ministry or prayer takes place, or prayer to bind spirits in children's bedrooms to stop them being tempted to sin, as Pat Boone practised.

If spirits are so localised, what happens when you leave the room to go to the toilet or to go home? Are you suddenly assailed by demonic forces in an environment that has not been cleansed of demons? One would have to constantly bind demons everywhere they went in order to be secure from satanic opposition. Such stuff is utter nonsense.

We never see the apostles first binding spirits before they had a prayer meeting or a church fellowship meeting. It never happened. Neither is there any apostolic teaching telling disciples to do such a thing.

Some also state that missionaries in pagan countries need to bind the spirits amongst shamanistic people before the Gospel can be preached effectively. First, the Bible never tells us to do this. Second, the apostles never practised this even though they evangelised in nations steeped in occultism and idolatry. Third, missionaries that had great success in occult places like Tibet (e.g. JO Fraser) never did this either.

But what about Jesus binding Satan? Let's look at this passage.

But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: 'Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.' Matt 12:25-29

Jesus is explaining his authority over Satan. The Jews had accused Jesus of being used by Satan even though he was delivering people from demonic servants of Satan. Jesus argued against this to explain that, being filled with the Spirit, it is the Spirit of God that has authority over Satan and his hordes and Jesus was thus able to master the servants of the Devil.

This has nothing to do with disciples today binding demons.

What about Gospel teaching that Christians will bind things on earth that are ratified in heaven? There are two situations in view:

The keys of the kingdom

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Matt 16:18-19

This is about Christ building his church on Earth. The keys, that is, the entrance into the church (as the place of the reign of God, the kingdom), is given to the apostles and their delegates.

'Binding and loosing' was a familiar phrase to the Jews and it means the authority to prohibit (bind) or to accept (loose). This is referring to apostolic doctrine – the measure of

what is acceptable and what is not in the church.⁵ The NT is the record of this; a specific example is Acts 15:20. Apostolic doctrine has forever certified what is acceptable and not in the church.

Note that Jesus says ‘whatsoever’, not ‘whosoever; the binding was of things, doctrines and practices, not personalities like spirits.

Peter, in Particular, is given the authority to first open the door of faith to the world – which he did in Acts 2:14-36.

So this passage has nothing at all to do with binding spirits.

Church discipline

Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Matt 18:15-18

This is very clear. If a church person sins he is to be disciplined. First he is warned alone. If he refuses to repent he is then warned by two or three brothers. If he still refuses to repent, he is then exposed in the church as a sinner and expelled and ostracised. This action of discipline is verified in heaven; the binding of the brother is assumed to be under the jurisdiction of heaven when enacted by the church. However, as Paul explains in 1 and 2 Corinthians, if the erring brother later repents and confesses openly to the church, he is to be loosed and allowed back into fellowship.

So this also has nothing to do with binding spirits.

The binding of spirits first developed in modern times in the Pentecostal churches and is another example of the intrusion of pagan occult teachings into Christianity. Binding spirits is common in shamanism and animism.

Power evangelism

This was a feature of the Signs and Wonders Movement of the mid-1980s to the late 1990s; the ‘Third Wave’ which was propagated chiefly by John Wimber. This was a movement that gulled even moderate Charismatics into accepting gross Latter Rain heresies associated with what is now called the New Apostolic Reformation, led by C Peter Wagner and many others.

As with many other Charismatic and Latter Rain innovations, it was a mixture of the occult with Christianity. In fact, Wimber later admitted quite openly to believing in all sorts of occult features; these included: the evil eye,⁶ tree dryads and water nymphs, the Oriental method of faith (‘the new paradigm’), ghosts, the necessary exorcism of Christians, coloured auras, revelatory dreams and so on. He also dismissed the Bible as the only source of divine revelation.

⁵ This is called ‘the regulative principle’.

⁶ A look that curses.

As the Charismatic Movement was a Trojan Horse to let in all sorts of occultism that had previously been active only within Pentecostalism, so the Signs and Wonders Movement, brought the full occultism of the Latter Rain extremes of fringe Pentecostalism. It was a part of the satanic plan to degrade the church.

The chief early feature of Wimber's programme was power evangelism, which was also the subject of various books. It became a serious gimmick that attracted the attention of churches worldwide that needed a shot in the arm as the power of Charismaticism was fading by about 1985.

The basis of power evangelism is to bring healing to non-Christian people on the streets, or in church meetings. Instead of merely witnessing to sinners and preaching the Gospel, what was now necessary was to first get their attention by healing them of various ailments. Techniques were taught on how to do this (which were mostly occult in nature).⁷

The claimed model was, of course, the ministry of Jesus and the original apostles. But this ministry was unusual and temporary. It was the means that God used to provide authentication that Jesus and the apostles were divinely sent; that their Gospel message was true. We know this because the miracles quickly ceased, as everyone agrees. What Wimber disagreed with is that it should not have ceased for 2,000 years and needed to be restored.

However, God's word also tells us that the ministry of the early church was unusual and exceptional.

**How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?
Heb 2:3-4**

Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. Acts 2:33

God used signs to witness to the Lord Jesus and the original apostles in an act of authentication.

In an age when all sorts of new philosophies,⁸ cults,⁹ sects,¹⁰ doctrines and religions¹¹ were abounding everywhere, the emergence of the Christian church required divine sanction to stand out as something different and heavenly. Individuals needed to know that this was not just another Near Eastern cult but something that was directly from God that was going to change the world.

Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. Acts 14:3

Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul. Acts 19:11

For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient - in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of

⁷ For example: holding your hand above the physical area of damage and then waving it continually while praying certain catch-phrases. This is occultism not Biblicity.

⁸ E.g. Gnosticism, Neoplatonism.

⁹ E.g. Mithraism.

¹⁰ E.g. the Essenes. In Greece, the holy clubs.

¹¹ E.g. Mithraism, Zoroastrianism, Hermetism.

the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. Rm 15:18-19

Even in the early church it was not all Christians that performed signs and wonders. It was the apostles and their specific delegates. Thus when the apostles began to die out, so also did the signs and wonders. In fact, the miracles faded long before John died towards the end of the first century. They had faded away within two or three decades after the cross. Paul talks about tongues, for example, in 1 Corinthians, which is a fairly early letter (around 56 AD), but not in any later book. None of the other apostles mention tongues in their letters. Since tongues were the most common sign gift, it can be presumed that the more unusual sign gifts had also vanished.

In 95 AD John is encouraging the church in persecution by writing the book of Revelation to demonstrate God's sovereignty in history and to assure believers of final victory. The church had gone from exuberance in miracles in the 30s to survival mode after the 60s. The ten Roman persecutions began with Nero who was the Roman emperor 54–68; especially after the fire which destroyed half of Rome in 64.

The mistakes of Wimber were:

- Firstly, to wrongly believe that everybody had the equal gifting and ability to work signs and wonders as they pleased. In fact it was a few men with authority as God pleased.
- Secondly, the belief that the special measure of miracles was for all time for the church to use when, in fact, it was for the beginning only as a specific means to prove that the apostles were from God and this new church that had appeared was genuine.
- Wimber also preached multiple doctrinal errors and aberrations of practice.

Based on Wimber's doctrine, many zealous and sincere believers went about the streets trying to heal strangers of various ailments to get their attention. I never heard of one person that was genuinely healed of a specific medical complaint (though many folk reported feeling strangely warm and vibrated, which are both common in mysticism).

Although this nonsense is still taught, in reality attempts to heal people are largely restricted to the hypnotic effects perpetrated in large crusade type meetings (which also do not really heal people).

Furthermore, the years of Wimber's influence did nothing to advance the church. After years of power evangelism church membership in the UK collapsed. Evangelism became less and less successful, missionary giving also collapsed and many churches closed. Some whole denominations vanished. In addition, society became more wicked, sin was legalised, and social infrastructure increasingly collapsed. The years of signs and wonders did nothing for society.

Wimberism did nothing to advance the church. How could it when it was based on doctrinal errors, mysticism, occultism and false promises. It was merely a gimmick that blew up like a bubble and then burst, leaving nothing useful behind.

Mysticism

Various cults, sects and Charismatics use mysticism and mystical techniques as a gimmick to entice people into their sphere of influence.

God designed us as rational creatures that use their intellect to resolve issues and think through problems. We should not react emotionally or wilfully with little forethought but should: consider, discriminate, reflect, deliberate, determine and decide. We judge our actions on the basis of God's law and seek to live according to his character.

Thus the fruit of the Spirit, the expression of the character of Christ, includes long-suffering and self-control. Being patient, long-suffering and restrained is godly behaviour. Self-control is having mastery over your passions; you don't react without thinking but patiently consider and act with restraint. The Christian filled with the Spirit is poised, cautious, considerate, and slow to get excited.

Moses is held up as a great champion of the faith, one of the greatest godly leaders in history, but he was stated to be the meekest man in all the Earth (Num 12:3). This is usually taken to mean poor or humble, but the point with Moses is lowliness or supreme self-control. The NT Greek word (*praus*) means gentleness of spirit. It is the meek that inherit the Earth (Ps 37:11; Matt 5:5). The meek have faith in God (Zeph 3:12).

Self-control with lowliness of spirit is a Christian virtue. The Christian does not yield self-control and is not given to changeable passions or unthinking reactions.

Now the essence of mysticism involves the yielding of self-control, personal discipline, intellectual consideration, deliberation and caution. It is the giving up of common sense and wisdom and submitting entirely to inner passions and irrationality.

Now mystics will dress up mysticism in fancy words and describe it as diving into God; rising up the rungs of a ladder to God; inner union with God; dying to one's self; yielding to the Spirit and suchlike. But in reality it is a ceasing of rational activity and personal control and yielding to the depths of inner emotions which claim to be union with the Godhead. It is no such thing; it is based emotionalism with no filter.

Thus when Charismatics engender mystical passivity through repetitive chanting and raised emotional atmospherics such that people fall over backwards in a faint – this is mysticism. It is yielding self-control and submitting to base feelings in the hope that these are God.

In more extreme circumstances that involve demonic manipulation, becoming passive and submissive leads people into deep suggestibility. While some collapse on the floor, others will behave erratically. They will scream, shout, laugh continually, dance, jump, writhe like a snake or make animal noises. All this is mystical lack of self-control.

When you submit yourself to your deep feelings without intellectual constraint, you become the plaything of demonic forces that deceive you because you have no defence against them. The defence is a renewed mind, living by faith, choosing the good and not the evil, looking unto Jesus, putting on Christ and so on. These all require intellectual activity and choosing the right thing. Mysticism just involves the emotions. It is unbalanced souliness. Being faithful involves intellectual decisions.

Mystics claim that there is benefit in not thinking; in rejecting intellectual doctrine; in yielding to what is claimed to be the Spirit (but it is not). 'Feel but do not think', they will say. 'Drink but don't think', they also say. 'Yield' is their favourite term.

What does God say?

Be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Rm 12:2

Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfil its* lusts. Rm 13:14

Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. Rm 14:5

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. Eph 1:18

Be renewed in the spirit of your mind. Eph 4:23

Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth ... And take the helmet of salvation [protecting the mind], and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God [the Word is vital in warfare]. Eph 6:14-17

Put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him. Col 3:10

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. 2 Tim 1:7

I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts. Heb 8:10

Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober. 1 Pt 1:13

If we are to be filled with the Spirit, are we not supposed to yield our mental faculties to him?

The Spirit never calls you to give up your intellectual processes. In fact, he always works on the basis of sound doctrine – the word of God. The Spirit never inculcates emotionalism. Remember that the fruit of the Spirit is self-control.

The believer is always to be watchful.

Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. Matt 26:41

Take heed, watch and pray. Mk 13:33

Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. Mk 14:38

Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy. Lk 21:36

Being watchful. Eph 6:18

Be serious and watchful in your prayers. 1 Pt 4:7

This means, never letting down your guard, always being alert, always being alive to what is going on and not being passive. Being watchful is the opposite of mysticism.

The real problem with mystics is that they yield to what is claimed to be the Spirit but they have no idea what they are yielding to because it involves no doctrine, no wisdom and no intellectual discrimination. Thus mystics yield to demonic forces pretending to be the Spirit. Thus throughout history, time after time, deceived mystics have always ended up doing stupid, dangerous or even horrific things. Mystics have called for disciples to strip naked and walk through the city (e.g. the Zwickau prophets, the New Light Prophets). Mystical prophets have called for disciples to kill religious opponents (e.g. the Cevenols) or introduce polygamy (e.g. the Munster tragedy). Mystics have claimed to be the Messiah (e.g. the Shakers or the Children of God). Mystics have indulged in overt occultism such as spiritualism and divination (the Shakers). We could go on and on. The fruit of mysticism is appalling.

Conclusion

The appearance of new gimmicks never ends. While men can fail to put off their old nature and manifest the flesh, so demonic forces will tempt them into following unorthodox teachings and methods.

It is also an aspect of the natural man to be interested in new things; to be attracted to the novel, the quirky and the fresh. This was always the case and was evident in the apostolic age:

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn *theirears* away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. 2 Tim 4:3-4

Many people are afraid of the humdrum, such as daily studying their Bible and searching out the truth by diligent study with prayer. Instead, people want a quick fix, instant solutions, some gimmick that promises much but in the end produces little.

Beware of gimmicks.

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