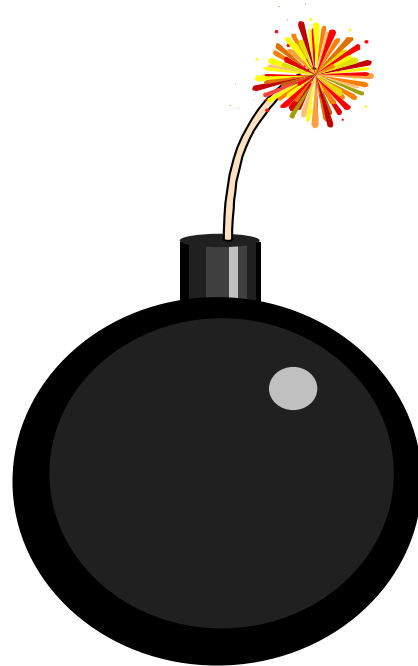


FALLACIES OF MODERN EVANGELICALISM

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FALLACIES OF MODERN EVANGELICALISM

In the 1920's the church began to fight back from the incursions of liberalism in teaching and practice. A series of books based on the fundamentals of the faith began to appear, written by eminent, orthodox scholars like B. B. Warfield. Others, like Gresham Machen, also took on the fight in other areas, at great cost to themselves. Later *Fundamentalism*, the name which grew up for Bible believing Christians in the States, became a term of derision, implying narrow-mindedness and bigotry. The American church began to take on board a different name which had emerged in England, and had grown popular in the 20's and 30's, which carried the same meaning as *Fundamentalist*, but without the derogatory connotations.

This was the word *Evangelical*. It arises from the Greek word for the Gospel (*evangelion*) which has been defined in many ways, but always carries the root idea of being based upon Gospel truth as revealed in the Bible. Evangelicals were Bible believing Christians, as opposed to church-goers who accepted liberal and humanistic philosophies. The current problem is that this is no longer the case. Evangelicals, so called, now include people who have given up on the Bible as a means of divine revelation to man, preferring a subjective inner witness. Other Evangelicals have sought unity at any cost, which often means abandoning certain Biblical doctrines, as if truth can be jettisoned for pragmatic reasons. An *Evangelical* is now largely understood to mean someone who has had an experience of God and is *born-again*, no matter what that person subsequently chooses to believe. No longer does *Evangelical* mean objectively: 'Biblical truth', it means an experience. A Roman Catholic who believes all the doctrines of the Council of Trent can now be Evangelical. An Eastern Orthodox convert can now be an Evangelical. Even Mormons are going to certain Evangelical meetings; how long before they are considered Evangelical too! Some Evangelical seminaries even teach that the Bible is not inerrant or fully inspired in all its parts. Evangelical, in popular usage, no longer means what it was chosen to mean when the word was designated. Similarly, modern Christians are no longer sure what they believe any more.

The modern church seems transfixed by a dependency upon clichés and aphorisms which dominate theological thinking. Instead of people drawing from the word of God and developing their own doctrinal viewpoints, there seems to be a vicarious drawing from a collective consciousness spawned by popular, superficial books and weak sermons. Few people consider themselves to be theologians, although everyone is either a good or a bad one. Few people take time to study the Bible to search for truth, preferring

words of comfort and encouragement. Few people rise above even basic doctrines, perhaps most even fail to find these. For instance, in teaching various groups in the last five years, I discovered that many individuals had little understanding about *Justification by Faith*, yet the Reformers considered this to be a fundamental doctrine to be understood by new converts.

Yet there is much talk about experiencing God, by which most people mean having an emotional experience above their normal state. (Called an *altered state of consciousness* by psychologists, and recently a term used by many Christians.) God, especially in the person of the Holy Spirit, is desired by many, but few bother to discover his person and attributes and character by the means he gave us - systematic study of his word.

As a result, many popularly accepted teachings in modern Evangelicalism have no Biblical support at all; yet they form part of the creed of most Christians. To demonstrate that they are, in fact, unbiblical leads to all sorts of criticism. To illustrate the point, I want to show you just a few of these which spring to mind. My purpose is to encourage folk to study the Bible for themselves and learn more about the God of our salvation and how we are to please him. I will not take a lot of space to fully develop the individual points, having covered them elsewhere, I simply wish to offer texts and a few words to stimulate the readers' own study.

[Unlike my other works, I have tried to keep source references to a minimum here to maintain the flow of the argument. I have treated most of the subjects elsewhere with detailed references. However, there should be enough for readers to follow through with queries, in fact, there are more footnotes than I would have liked, but I feel that they are necessary.]

False Ideas About The Bible

A low view of the Bible

Since the end of the last century, the Bible has come under a series of unprecedented attacks. The Documentary Hypothesis and Higher Critical methods of an earlier generation have still left its mark on today's Evangelicalism. However, recent controversies and movements have also had a debilitating effect on contemporary Christians. There is not the space here to list all these, but the effect of esteemed Christian theologians and preachers denying great doctrines (like eternal punishment), watering down crucial creedal statements in favour of a unifying approach (like justification by faith alone) and suggesting that historical parts of the Bible are allegorical, myth or mistakes (like creation out of nothing in six literal days), have helped to prepare a foundation of mistrust in the authority of the Bible. Indeed, one national church leader has recently said that the Bible has failed us; yet thousands of Christians trust in his leadership.

At the same time, the overwhelming impact of the Charismatic Renewal Movement, the Signs & Wonders Movement, the Toronto Experience and other recent fads have encouraged a tendency to rely upon experience as the touchstone of truth. More and more church leaders are taking up certain practices, condemned by God's word, because of pragmatism. What works must be acceptable. If people get healed, then it must be God. If people feel good about a certain practice, it must be sound. If people feel a greater subjective 'love' for God as a result of a certain experience, it must be the Holy Spirit. Folk fail to realise that all these things are experienced in occult religions and cults. Occult experiences also draw people to feel close to God, or subjectively warm. We must judge experiences by an absolute - God's word, not our subjective feelings.

Logistic problems are also allowed to override scripture. For instance: it is often acceptable to abandon celebrating the Lord's supper weekly (or ever) because numbers create difficult practical problems.² Or, principles of fellowship (*koinonia*) are forsaken because a leader wants to concentrate congregations together, into a large meeting, for ease of unifying propaganda; despite the Biblical fact that the very reason for gathering is mutual edification in *koinonia* (fellowship).

¹ For instance, Roman Catholics will accept the idea of justification by faith; but not the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone.

² I do not wish to condemn sound churches as heterodox because they only break bread fortnightly or monthly. There are slight differences of opinion as to how often this should be done. I feel that Acts 20:7 and 1 Cor 11 indicate a weekly practice when all the saints come together. My criticism here is of groups which see no importance of celebrating the memorial regularly, if at all.

The specific problems abounding are one thing, but worse is that fact that God's word is being made to bow down to man's subjective ideas. In some Christian circles one is subject to ridicule if one criticises a certain practice as being unbiblical. The cry of 'inflexible', 'intolerant', 'legalistic' or such, is levelled at critics. These condemnations are not usually accompanied by a look at Biblical teaching to check the matter; peer pressure or the authoritative words of the leader are deemed to be sufficient justification for insults. Even if one can get people to accept a criticism as genuine, the response is often that, 'nobody's perfect', or, 'no church will ever be perfect so we must tolerate the unbiblical hiccoughs'.³

This is indeed a worrying situation. Very few churches could justify many of their practices in the light of scripture, yet not only do they continue unabashed but condemn others who don't worship in a similar fashion. Peer pressure, within denominations particularly, is a very strong aid to tunnel vision. New denominations (like Restorationist groups) appear to be worse still. The tradition of the past, or the tradition of current fads in these denominations has almost a stranglehold on the truth. Not that these groups would admit this. They would claim to be upholding a reverence for the word (although some wouldn't even do that). The problem is that Biblical exposition (not exegesis - there isn't much of that) is determined by the agendas of the group in question. The Bible is esteemed, but is then used to corroborate the tenets of the movement. General study to see what it says itself is largely ignored. This is the method of the cults. This is why Mormons and others can make the Bible justify practices which it, in reality, condemns.

The problem is that we must let the Bible speak for itself. Teaching ministry must open up what God says in his word, not impose a set of presuppositions. We must produce disciples who know what the Bible says, not what their leaders think. To suggest, as some, that it is more important to follow the moving of the Holy Spirit than study scripture, is foolish in the extreme. The Holy Spirit inspired the writing of it and applies it to men's consciences. He always works on the basis of the word and is not adding to it in this generation. Historical surveys reveal that the men who most honoured the word of God were used in mighty ways by the Holy Spirit. How can we test the spirits, as we are commanded to do, unless we know the word of God which is the test? We cannot ignore the high place the word has in our lives. To do so results in death and bondage. Only the truth can make us free.

³ I don't think that Jesus ever lowered his standard of demanding perfection of love (Matt 5:48) and of holiness (1 Pt 1:15-16). Neither did Paul lower his 'command' that all things be done decently and in order (1 Cor 14:37-40). We should never satisfy ourselves with any standard known to be less than the Biblical norm, in ourselves or in the church. We do not bring God's will down to an achievable human level. Our failings do not allow us to minimise God's standards.

As an example of this trend I supply the following facts taken from a widely circulated Evangelical magazine, which I will not embarrass by naming. For the 95p cover price one can have 8 pages of articles, 4 pages of photographic testimonies of undocumented healing, and 3 pages which solicit money (one page selling books and videos, the other two just asking for money to further the 'vision'). On the 8 text pages we get 4 articles. The first two pages are about an ecological disaster which is supposed to fulfil prophecy, though no solid evidence is given. There is one sentence which refers to Rev 8:10-11. The next article comprises two pages, explaining part of the editor's vision (he is also the sponsor of the ministry requesting finance, and the writer of all the articles, but one). This contains various charismatic visions and demonic confrontations in mission work in the USSR. There are no Biblical references. The third article is two pages summarising the current fascination with global conspiracy theories. There are two sentences which refer to Daniel and Revelation. The final article is two pages explaining why a forthcoming war in the Middle East is imminent. There are no Bible references.

The net result is: three sentences referring to the Bible in all the 'teaching' studies of this magazine. However, there are many references to charismatic practices and undocumented 'proofs' of powerful ministry. Also, readers should consider that all the articles are expositions of one particular eschatological stance. There are other views which better explain current events and the passages referred to. The viewpoint of this magazine is based on a theory of the end⁴ which appeared for the first time in 1830 and defies sound Biblical exegesis. It is not a healthy balance for a magazine to focus only on the end times anyway. Furthermore, the publication has hardly any references to Jesus or any explanation of the great Gospel truths. Despite this, it sells reasonably well in shops and some churches distribute it to all their congregation regularly.

If this is the state which the church has fallen into, we are indeed in serious trouble.

A lack of systematic Bible study

This obviously follows from the points raised above. What is worrying is that the average Christian is perfectly happy with a weekly sermon that keeps their interest in one way or another. If it is topical, entertaining and not too long it is acceptable. If it is thought provoking, Biblical and affects life, it is extremely good. If it is inspirational, charismatic and prophetic, then it is supremely good.

⁴ Dispensational Premillennialism.

Now I am not criticising relevant Biblical messages. There is always a place in the church for exhortations and encouragement. But let's call it such. What is desperately needed is proper, systematic, expositional Biblical and Doctrinal teaching. There has to be a balance between devotional, practical encouraging words and systematic teaching.

In a conversation with a church leader, he informed me of his deep concern that people had no idea of the overall plan and purpose of God as revealed in the Bible. Many in his flock treated it as a promise box of blessing to be claimed when needed. One member had recently approached him, asking if the verse: *'I will make you the father of many nations'*, was applicable to him! I find that most Christians do not understand the over-arching plan of God's revelation. They do not understand the relation of the old covenant to the new. For instance, some seem to have never read Hebrews, which argues that the old testament practices of priesthood, sacrifices, tabernacle/temple rituals, fasts, festivals etc. have all been cancelled. Few appear to understand how all these things are summed up in Jesus, and we find our fulness in him; we no longer need external methods of spirituality.

Scripture is full of examples of how to preach, teach and disciple. The great model is, of course, Jesus. His teaching stretched people. Some even left him because they couldn't follow it. His teaching was demanding. Some couldn't follow him because it required of them more than they felt they could give. His teaching was thorough. He showed how obscure matters in the Old Testament related to himself and the cross. His teaching turned on specific words, even to his detractors, much was made out of what seemed trivial to most.

The Bible contains the thoughts of God. We must teach our people what it is saying. We cannot just give weekly encouragements to help folk continue, but in addition, we must expound the details and truths of God's word systematically. Folk must develop in their awareness of what the truth is and how it applies to them. Without that they will always be in one sort of bondage or another, for it is only the truth that makes us free.

The great doctrines of God's word must be taught to all his people. We must not shy away from explaining even difficult subjects like election and total depravity. We fail God and his people if we do not properly teach and apply the Bible to his flock.

False Ideas About God

God loves the sinner but hates the sin

This phrase appears nowhere in the Bible; but more to the point, it is in opposition to the tenor of scripture and the character of God. Sin is appalling to our holy and perfect God. We have no idea just how bad it is for God to suffer, with patience, our sinful ruination of a world he created perfect.

The Bible also makes clear that sin is inextricably involved with the person who sins. The sinner and the sin cannot be viewed separately. To emphasise this, the Bible tells us that sin arises in the heart (Jer 17:9), the mind (Gen 6:5, Rm 1:28), the body (Rm 6:12), the soul (Rm 2:9), and the spirit (Mk 1:23); which is why we require a complete sanctification (1 Thess 5:23).

God cannot love sin, it is completely against his nature to do so. He loves the elect whilst they are sinners (Rm 5:8) because they are viewed as being in Christ from eternity (Eph 1:4). If God could love sin or sinners as they are, why was Jesus' sacrifice necessary?

In fact God hates both sin and sinners.

- **Man is God's enemy** (Rm 5:10).
- **'Thou hatest all evildoers'** (Ps 5:5)
- **'God is a righteous judge, and a God who has indignation every day.'** (Ps 7:11, i.e. every day God is angry, i.e. with sinners and sin.)
- **'Thou hast destroyed the wicked; thou hast blotted out their name for ever and ever.'** (Ps 9:5)
- **'The Lord has made himself known, he has executed judgment; the wicked are snared in the work of their hands.'** (Ps 9:16)
- **'The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked, and his soul hates him that loves violence. On the wicked he will rain coals of fire and brimstone ... for the Lord is righteous, he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face.'** (Ps 11:6-7)
- (After describing the wicked in v 1-4 David says): **'All the evil-doers ... shall be in great terror, for God is with the generation of the righteous.'** (Ps 14:4-5)
- **'In whose (i.e. God's) eyes a reprobate is despised, but who honours those who fear the Lord.'** (Ps 15:4)
- **'With the crooked thou dost show thyself perverse.'** [show oneself unsavoury, wrestle]. (Ps 18:26)
- **'Because they (the wicked v3) do not regard the works of the Lord ... he will break them down and build them up no more.'** (Ps 28:5)
- **'The face of the Lord is against evil-doers to cut off the**

- remembrance of them from the earth.’ (Ps 34:16)
- ‘The Lord laughs at the wicked ... the wicked perish; the enemies of the Lord are like the glory of the pastures, they vanish - like smoke ... transgressors shall be altogether destroyed ... the salvation of the righteous is from the Lord.’ (Ps 37:13,20,38-39)
- ‘You love righteousness and hate wickedness.’ (Ps 45:7)

Conversely:

- ‘All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.’ (Ps 25:10)
- ‘The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him and he makes known to them his covenant.’ (Ps 25:14)
- ‘O how abundant is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for those who fear thee ... Love the Lord, all you his saints! The Lord preserves the faithful, but abundantly requites him who acts haughtily.’ (Ps 31:19,23)
- ‘Many are the pangs of the wicked; but steadfast love surrounds him who trusts in the Lord.’ (Ps 32:10)
- ‘Continue thy steadfast love to those who know thee ... the evil-doers lie prostrate, they are thrust down, unable to rise.’ (Ps 36:10,12)
- ‘The Lord knows the days of the blameless, and their heritage will abide for ever ... the righteous shall be preserved for ever, but the children of the wicked shall be cut off.’ (Ps 37:18,28)

Verses like these could be multiplied ad infinitum.

The point of mentioning this in detail is the appalling effect this wrong idea has on the preaching of the Gospel. If God loves a sinner, why should he bother to repent at all? A loving God will send no one to Hell. More on this shortly.

God loves everybody equally

Again this is universally believed in Evangelicalism, though it never used to be so amongst our wiser forebears. Again there is no scriptural evidence for this whatsoever. Yet we have been so brought up on this idea that to challenge it meets with the utmost hostility. Nowhere does the Bible state that God loves all men or everyone. The closest we can get is Jn 3:16 where it says that God loved the world.

Now the word ‘world’ here cannot mean everyone in the world since it goes on to say that Jesus was sent *‘that the world might be saved through him’*. If it

means everyone in verse 16, it must mean everyone in v17. This would turn all Biblical teaching on salvation upside down and mean that everybody gets saved (i.e. the doctrine of universalism). This cannot be true, especially as v18 states that there are already people who are condemned (i.e. not saved). Also in v19 Jesus says that in the world men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

In Jn 17:3-9 Jesus shows clearly that he will not save everyone and does not pray for the world, but only those given to him by the Father, the elect, those loved by God. In fact, Jesus himself did not express love to all. He vehemently opposed certain religious hypocrites calling them: '*brood of vipers*', '*whitewashed tombs*', '*serpents*', (Matt 23:27ff), '*children of Hell*' (Matt 23:13-15), and children of the Devil (Jn 8:44-47).

The word *world* does not mean the earth and does not always even suggest it. The Greek word *Kosmos* means an ordered arrangement, beauty (we get our word cosmetic from it), thence the framework of the universe, an organic whole, world. In John's gospel it doesn't always mean everyone (e.g. 12:19, 1:29 - if Jesus took away the sins of everyone, all men would be saved). In fact he tells us not to love the world (i.e. the system of the world) in 1 Jn 2:15-17, and that the world hates believers and Jesus (Jn 15:18-21), that believers are not part of this world (Jn 15:16).

Various expositors have explained Jn 3:16 as referring to all types of men or all the world of the elect, the sum total of God's people.⁵ It may also be a pointed expression, used by Jesus to Nicodemus, to show that salvation is also open to those outside Israel; this was a shocking thought to the Jews of the time.

We have seen that God actually hates and is indignant to certain people every day. How can we suggest that God loves everyone when the Bible says that he hates some?

The idea that God loves everyone is supposed to aid evangelism. It certainly helps break the ice but how can untruth help witnessing? It actually hinders the Gospel. In fact, not only do we never see the apostles say this in evangelism, but the word love does not even appear in the Acts of the Apostles at all. If God loves everyone, why should an individual worry about his salvation, God loves him, he must therefore be safe. This must hinder witnessing. The truth that man has broken God's law, is an enemy of God, that Hell is awaiting him unless he repents, that Jesus is a perfect saviour who can rescue the lost, this is truth which breaks the fallow ground and

⁵ E.g: many Reformed commentaries; A.W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (unedited version, not the violently abridged Banner of Truth edition); several Reformed systematic theologies.

prepares the way for the Gospel.

Although this doctrine may seem shocking to many, the idea that God has determined only to love and save a portion of the human race is not only Biblical, but has been a feature of all the best historic orthodox confessions going back to the church Fathers. It is clearly demonstrated in the Westminster Confession, for instance (e.g: Section 3:3,4,5,6; 5:6; 10:1,4).

False Ideas About Ourselves

False Ideas About Conversion

The first, and most obvious feature of modern conversions is the absence of genuine repentance. In fact certain 'converts' have no idea at all about the concept. A statistical survey of all the converts coming through the Alpha course in a northern city showed that none of them experienced conviction of sin or repentance. Published Alpha testimonies have also shown this deficiency. Some are very worrying, like the man who couldn't wait to get past the teaching preamble (the Gospel) and get 'zapped' by the Spirit. The Alpha course focuses too heavily on the *felt* presence of the Holy Spirit instead of the atonement of Christ and justification by faith. It leads more to embracing a new lifestyle rather than a new life in Christ. In fact, the resurrection of Christ (a cardinal Gospel teaching) is only tapped on as an appendix to talk one as an evidence for Jesus' divine status.

Conversion is being touted as an experience disassociated from truth. Some recent testimonies of Alpha converts reveal no acceptance of Gospel truth (sin, repentance, faith in Christ, getting right with God etc.) but rather they talk about the effects of the 'Holy Spirit week-end', feeling happy, 'It's about feelings really', 'I just felt loved' etc. Nicky Gumbel is happy with this, feeling that the Enlightenment resulted in an emphasis on doctrine and the mind, but today's post-modern person requires an experience of the Spirit.⁶ The problem is that the invitation to receive the Spirit can easily come before there has been any real conversion from sin to Christ. Any received experience is then accepted as being from God, endorsing a person's salvation when this experience could arise from: heightened expectation, fleshly excitement or Satanic counterfeit.

The Gospel has to be Christ centred not Spirit centred. Even if it was Spirit centred, the Spirit's real Gospel work is to convict the world of sin, not give groovy experiences.

Even if repentance is genuine, the idea that it is life-long has faded into insignificance and confusion. The life of the believer is to be one of following

⁶ Nicky Gumbel, *Telling Others - The Alpha Initiative*, p19.

Christ and dying to oneself. Christianity was originally called *The Way* because it was about discipleship - following Christ and being conformed unto him. Today's Christian sees repentance as a one off experience (if it is understood at all). Having turned to God, many feel that they can now do as they please because their sins are all forgiven. Yet the proof of conversion is that a believer will grow in grace and practical holiness, as they are conformed to Christ. This is continually turning away (repenting) from sin and self interest and obeying God. If a convert does not become gradually more holy, one must question whether their conversion is genuine.

Much of the reason for this has been the focus upon instant decisions, altar calls, standing up and being counted in a Gospel meeting, praying a dictated prayer, having a 'spiritual' experience, and so on. Conversion is seen as an instant experience with no ongoing requirements: 'Because I've prayed the sinner's prayer, I'm saved'. No; conversion is the entrance into a new life with new responsibilities, new loyalties, new relationships, new commandments. John even says that we can only know for sure that we are saved if we obey Christ's commandments (1 Jn 2:3-6). This means ongoing repentance, turning away from selfish motivations and following Christ.

If we fail to deal with this issue, we fall into the mystical trap. We don't obey Christ's law, don't heed God's written word and so begin to rely upon internal feelings of revelation. This really follows from the origin of being 'saved' due to an experience. This subjective foundation leads to subjective revelation. Because the conversion was not based on God's word but on a feeling induced at a meeting, hearing from God is also divorced from God's word and based upon internal feelings, visions, impressions, prophecies, dreams and so on.

The Greek word for repentance (*metanoia*) means: a change of mind leading to a change of behaviour, a turning about, a change of opinion in respect to one's acts. It does not refer to a subjective change of heart or feelings, neither is it an experience per se. It is being convinced of a position in the mind as truth is brought to bear upon it. This understanding involves conviction of sin. The mind realises the awfulness of its sinfulness before God and the will determines to do something about it. This all results from God's grace since repentance is a gift from God (Acts 5:21, 11:18; 2 Tim 2:25-26; Heb 12:17).

We are not to exercise our intelligence to control of our lives but rather should trust God in some undefined way

Congregations are being foolishly encouraged to not control themselves but to let God control them. Frequently believers are being exhorted not to think

but receive, not to examine but to trust, not to question but accept (i.e. an experience). It sounds laudable to the spiritually immature, but is totally erroneous. At worst it can lead to a passivity, which dangerously gives an open opportunity for Satan to enter into our lives. It can also lead to a sort of holy neurosis where a person is incapable of making decisions.

I once knew a young Christian desperate to serve God and do his will. This sort of teaching had pre-occupied his mind to the degree that he began to pray at every street corner for direction as to which way he should turn en route to work. He nearly ended up having a nervous breakdown.

God has created us with many faculties which he expects us to use. We have no need of divine guidance or control for these everyday functions. We don't need God to give us a word of knowledge when to go to bed and when to wake up. We don't need to pray about whether to bath or shower.

God has given us a mind to reflect and consider, and a will to choose upon reflection. This is God's way for us to get on with our daily lives. His word to us in this connection is:

I have endowed with an able mind (Ex 28:3)

There is no distinction between spiritual and ordinary life. All aspects of our lives are to glorify God. Every part of our life is to be given over to him (Rm 12:1). Having committed it to him, we get on with it, guided by his principles. God wants our minds to be suffused with his word so that we instinctively know what is his will, having trained our faculties to respond in a Christ-like way. This is what it means to hide his word in our hearts.

In the book of Acts we see godly men make decisions without prior reference to God because they knew his mind, being guided by the principles of his word. In Acts 15:22, *'It seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church.'* A decision was made by discussion and consensus (Acts 15:25). James had earlier given his judgment on the issue (v19). This was ratified by the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28). We see phrases like *'Paul thought best'* (Acts 15:38), *'Paul chose'* (Acts 15:40), *'Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him'* (Acts 16:3), *'He left Athens and went to Corinth ... because he was of the same trade he stayed with them'* (Acts 18:1-3), *'Paul resolved in the Spirit'* (Acts 19:21), *'he determined to return'* (Acts 20:3), *'Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus'* (Acts 20:16). Only rarely do we see guidance by visions or prophecy, and then for highly significant advances in the church's mission; and even then Paul doesn't always feel right to comply (in Acts 16:9-10 he does, and 21:4,11 he does not - and this is said to be the will of the Lord, v14).

It is our attitude to God's sovereignty that is critical in our lives. We can

superstitiously and superficially act slavishly to God whilst being of a rebellious spirit towards him. We can tithe mint and cumin yet disregard the weightier matters of the law.

God wants our heart to follow him. He wants our wills submissive to him. Yet we do not become automatons but real people. Jesus is the great example here. His whole life was conducted in submission to the Father. He only did what his Father did and said what his Father said (see John's Gospel). However, we do not see a passive person but an active one (see Mark's Gospel). We don't see an indecisive person but a radical man with a clear mission. He was in control, but he was also submissive. His life was obedience in action.

The old popular phrase 'Let go, let God' has been highly criticised in recent years, perhaps unjustly. It was originally coined to encourage people seeking God's blessing to stop striving, cease trying to receive blessing by human effort, and trust God. The Holy Spirit comes by hearing with faith (Gal 3:2) not human effort or legalism. However, as so often, the injunction was perverted into a popular usage to discourage any action. It engendered a passivity and inactivity in the war against sin. It was used to defend an ineffective use of God's time and grace. It condoned a slack attitude towards the flesh instead of mortifying it. This criticism of it is just. God does not intend us to *let go* of the requirement to struggle against sin, to wisely make decisions every day, to travail in prayer, to never fail to do good to all people, to bear one another's burdens in the body of Christ, to persevere in seeking God, to be attentive to the direction of the Holy Spirit, to make the most of the time, to faithfully bear witness to the Gospel of God and to take every opportunity to glorify Christ.

We are not to yield control of our lives but are to use the faculties God gave us responsibly with an attitude of submission to God. In crises we cry to him for special guidance. When we require it, grace will be there *in time of need*. But in the day to day run of the mill situations, our lives should be in touch with God as a result of our communion (especially first thing in the day), and our decisions based upon knowledge of God's principles laid down for living in the Bible.

**Our free will determines God's use of our lives.
God's purposes can be thwarted by our disobedience.
God's purposes are advanced by our faith alone.**

The idea that any man's will is free is a fallacy in itself. Man is conditioned by his mental faculties and emotional dispositions. He is bound by his tendency to self preservation. He is not free to put his hands into a fire (unless he is mentally disturbed) or leap off a tall building (unless affected by drugs or was

born on Krypton). A man is not free to eat something he doesn't like (unless forced to by his mother) or watch Neighbours (unless forced to by his kids)! We choose what we are conditioned to want.

In the spiritual realm man is bound completely. He is not free to choose spiritual good. He is unable to even respond to the Gospel unaided by God. The Bible says that he is dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1), unable to resurrect himself. He needs to be born again and cannot regenerate himself. The first action in conversion is always taken by God. It is those appointed to salvation who believe (Acts 13:48), those who receive faith from God (Eph 2:8), those drawn by the Father (Jn 6:44, 65).

The God of the Bible is seen to predestine all things according to his sovereign good pleasure (Eph 1:11). Everything is under the control of a God who is Lord and King, even the hairs on our head or the sparrows in the field. This God is supreme. Nothing can controvert his will. He is omnipotent. Can we really suggest that God can be thwarted by our disobedience? Did he not see all our lives before we were even born and determine them? (See: Ps 37:18, 139:16 - the word *formed* means to squeeze into shape, determine. God planned our days.)

Nothing takes this God by surprise. Nothing! He is working to a plan and purpose (Eph 1:10,3:9). This plan is a mystery, prepared before time began, and Christians are vital constituents in that plan. If God was at the whim of our faith and disobedience that plan would need constant revision. God would be continually pre-occupied with amending his purposes for different people. After working with one church for a while, when they failed, he would have to begin working with another, spend years to get them to a similar place and then utilise them for the purposes planned for the other. This is ludicrous, especially since we all fail to a lesser or greater degree all the time. God is not trapped by our actions. God's decrees (ordinances, purposes) were established in eternity and are fixed (Ps 93:5). There is no change or amendment to that plan. Our failures are taken into account. God isn't desperately searching for someone to have enough faith to act according to his wishes, God gives faith to the person of his choice. That person has been prepared before time to be exactly the person God wants and to do all that God desires (Jer 1:5; Acts 9:15). Even our good works are planned in advance by God (Eph 2:10).

This does not make God accountable for sin. God's elective purposes are the acts of choosing rather than being at the whim of fate or men, yet the acts of sin that men commit are the responsibility of themselves. Men sin because they choose to sin. God controls not only these sinful acts but all evil things (Isa 45:7; Lam 2:17, 3:37-38). The key to history is God's sovereignty working

out his eternal purposes. We can no more thwart those than a worm can stop a moving car.

The examples of Israel and Judas make this very clear. God did not have to switch to plan B when Israel became faithless (Ezek 16). God always purposed that a Messiah would be necessary, in fact Jesus agreed to be this Messiah before the world was made. God's purpose with Judas was not that he should be obedient (Mt 26:24), but rather that he should betray his son and initiate Jesus' final persecution. Jesus did not make a mistake when choosing him, he heard God's voice on the matter clearly after praying all night (Lk 6:12-16). God's purposes take full account of the levels of our disobedience and our faith.

If you don't use your gifts you'll lose them

Again, this is a popular fallacy. We do not need to spend much time on this as the Bible is very clear. In Roman 11:29 we are told that God's gift and calling are irrevocable. That means what it says. A man can disobey God and fall aside and waste his calling and gifts. A man can be perverted by temptation and use the gifts wrongly or use his calling to gain wealth or manipulate people. God may take a man or a church out of the way through disobedience, the testimony may be removed ('lampstand', Rev 2:5). Yet the calling and gifting does not alter. History is full of examples of gifted men making a mockery of the things of God. Their gifting is not disputed, but their wisdom is.

Young Christians should not be disturbed by this fallacy. Yes, we should encourage everyone to use the gifts that God has given them and to seek his purposes in their lives. But under no circumstances should this inspire hasty action, unwise activity (such as leaving college or a career for full time service). Neither should folk precipitately minister under a threat or fear of losing their gift through under-use.

In the parable of the talents a man entrusted gifts to his servants to use. At his coming (after a long time, i.e. the second coming of Jesus to review our work), the use of the talents was evaluated. Although the unwise servant lost out in the future life (i.e. rewards in the new earth, after the second coming), he did not lose his talent whilst in this world. It was hidden, it was wasted, it was foolish, but it was still there. Many godly men have found themselves in circumstances where they have been unable to minister for various reasons (e.g. poor health, domestic responsibilities) for many years. To all intents and purposes it seemed that they had lost all their former promise. Then, in God's time, a door opened up for service and they were gloriously used beyond everyone's possible expectations. The lack of use did not alter the investment God placed in them.

Scripture teaches that everyone has been given a gift in Christ (Eph 4:7), we should seek to use it to Christ's glory; but if it is God's will for us to be put aside for a time, our job is to accept the will of the Lord and patiently wait. We do not need to fear losing our function, nor do we need to rush out and force our gift on others. God is faithful.

Christians should have the victory over suffering and be prosperous

Who can doubt that Christians are called to victory, surely no one. Yet our ideas of what this victory means can sometimes be very different from the view of the Bible. Great saints are commended for their lives in scripture, yet they were often far from prosperous. In fact, very few were prosperous. Job springs to mind as one, but who would choose to endure his suffering? Joseph also had wealth in Egypt; but he did not value it and also suffered greatly being left for dead in a hole in the ground, sold as a slave, treated unjustly, imprisoned and betrayed by his brothers.

Jesus is God in the flesh, yet he was brought up in a poor home, he had nowhere to rest his head and owned no property. Paul's sufferings are well known and itemised in 2 Corinthians. At one point he was so afflicted that he despaired of life itself. Elijah knew tremendous depression and wanted to die. So did Jonah for different reasons.

Yet these were all men of faith!

The Bible's idea of success seems to be very different to ours. Far from suffering being seen as something to be avoided, it is treated as very necessary in the development of grace in our lives. Paul longed to share Christ's sufferings (Phil 3:10), because he knew that it was the way to experience God's grace and demonstrate a powerful testimony (2 Cor 12:9). God promises to give us what we need for effective ministry, not excessive comfort (2 Cor 9:8). Although God sometimes brings healing to us supernaturally, sometimes he does not. It is not automatic. What is vital is to hear God. Paul had the gift of healing yet left Trophimus sick at Miletus, neither did he cure Timothy's stomach disorder but suggested medicine.

I believe in God's supply and his supernatural power in us, but I strongly resent the glib talk of men who suggest that this can be manipulated by us at our whim to do what we like. That is a travesty of God's teaching. Our success in the Christian life is not measured in terms of money, possessions, health, power, and other worldly ideas of success, rather it is measured in Christ-likeness and love. Some of the greatest saints in history led appalling

lives by modern standards. David Brainerd was always ill and died before he was thirty, but not before he had successfully brought the Gospel to the North American Indians through his selfless, faithful ministry. Watchman Nee spent twenty years in prison and died shortly after his release. Much of his time there was occupied in translating communist propaganda. Was that a waste? John Bunyan was poor and imprisoned, but without that we would not have had the Pilgrim's Progress, one of the most influential works in Christian history. Neither would his preaching have had the power to attract great Puritans like John Owen.

Let's take care to judge ourselves and others in the light of God, not by false misconceptions that sound spiritual but are, in fact, fleshly.

The lack of discernment and judgment

One of the key areas of weakness in modern Christians is the appalling absence of real discernment about what is going on today. For many this is self inflicted, since they have been foolishly conditioned to believe that any kind of judgment of a movement, person or teaching is wrong. '*Judge not, that you be not judged*', they quote (Matt 7:1). As a result of this error, they accept many false ideas, tolerate many false teachers, fail to judge false prophecy, and so the progress of deception accelerates throughout the land. Again, proper Biblical study gives us a different picture and a command to judge and even contend (fight) for the the truth.

There are six passages, in the NT, which seem to rebuke judging, but there are eleven passages which demand it. This means that a proper evaluation of these texts is necessary to understand the issue of judging. There is a proper judgment and an improper one. A pharasaical, cynical, judgmental spirit is condemned; but a proper investigation, analysis, discernment and judgment of all things in the church is commanded. If we fail to test new (or old) ideas, practices, teachings and ministries being introduced into church life, then we are all accountable before God. Make no mistake here; 'ordinary' believers cannot abandon their involvement and leave it to 'professional' leaders. The whole church is involved in this testing process. Paul's letters, for instance, are nearly always addressed to church members, not church leaders. If error is tolerated in your church, and you have not spoken out against it, you are partly responsible for it and will be called to account for this to God.

The book of Hebrews is a vital book for today's church. Not only are many of the doctrines treated being actively abused in many places, but the whole point of the Christian life being treated here is, largely, unknown. Because there are difficult passages, many don't even read it; and yet it is full of tremendous exhortations and encouragements for the modern Christian. In

chapters 5 and 6 the author bemoans his hearers' lack of growth in knowledge, and challenges them to deal with this. He explains one of the key goals of the Christian life on earth and shows that only growing in understanding of Biblical doctrine leads to this goal. Then he shows what this goal is. What does development in the word of righteousness lead to? What is God's purpose for the mature? It is - to judge; to distinguish good from evil. We become mature so that we can discern what is right and what is wrong. Maturity is when a person understands God's word and can apply it to situations and judge what is correct. (See Heb 5:11-14).

One of the passages in scripture which is never preached on in charismatic or authoritarian churches is Acts 17:11; and yet Luke draws special attention to it. It refers to the Berean Jews who had heard Paul but then checked out what he said, from the scriptures, to see if it was true. For this they were said to be 'more noble'. They stood in judgment on Paul's words and were applauded for it. How many people are told to accept what they hear from their leaders without question? How many people have been castigated for questioning policy demanded by modern apostles and prophets? If the apostle and brother of the Lord, James, could make many mistakes (Jam 3:1-2), if Jews were commended for checking on Paul, how much more should we all be checking, judging, what is heard from platforms and books today? A good pointer to safety is: does your leader actively encourage you to check out what he says by pointing to scripture or helpful books? Or does he forbid you to read certain things or hear certain tapes because they are 'unhelpful and will cause confusion'!⁷

Church leaders are especially called to exercise discernment and judgment because the body is to be kept pure. People committing gross sin are to be cast out; that is an exercise of judgment. But gross error is also to be purged, whether it is an error of teaching or a false practise. Historical leaders, even those involved in extraordinary revivals like Peter Cartright, refused to tolerate people who persistently screamed, fainted (i.e. being slain in the spirit), shouted or made unseemly noises or physical agitations. Today, these practices are not only tolerated but actively sought by many. The defences of the church have been broken down.

But at the individual level, there is also a gross misunderstanding about the practice of discernment. Many feel that this is a spiritual gift which comes spontaneously to a few, and then excuse themselves for not having any. They tolerate their lack of responsibility by changing discernment into a grace gift. Everyone is called to be discerning. Time after time the scriptures exhort

⁷ Yes I have heard of 'Evangelical' preachers who have demanded that members should not read certain books because they were opposed to his teaching. On checking, these authors were orthodox, consistently sound, Biblical theologians.

believers to prove all things, test all things and contend for the faith. They are told not to tolerate this but to endorse that. The ability to do this comes not like a package out of heaven, but as a result of arduous studying of the word of God under submission to the Holy Spirit. There needs to be a desire to know, followed by an effort to learn. Peter says that supplementing our faith with knowledge is second only to virtue (2 Pt 1:5). Knowledge is vital to conduct our lives properly and discern what is right and wrong in the church.

Tolerance is not a virtue. We must discern what is evil and unbiblical and then denounce it, to ensure growth in holiness for ourselves and our congregations. In extremes, this may result in withdrawing from some as directed in 1 Cor 5:9-13. We must judge those who pervert true doctrine (2 Jn 7-13; Titus 1:9-14). We must judge what is true doctrine (Acts 17:11) and those who teach it (Matt 24:4-5; 1 Jn 4:1-3). We must judge those who are factious (Titus 3:10-11) and especially, we must judge our own conduct (1 Cor 11:28-32).

False Ideas About church

Focus on men instead of God

Go into any purpose built accommodation where a church meets and you will find the same thing - the whole floor space is directed to a point where one man will speak. In the days of public address systems, this is not due to acoustics but control dynamics. The result is that the whole gathered church is forced to focus on a man, or sometimes a small group of men. Is this Biblical? It most certainly is not, in fact it is diametrically opposed to the whole purpose of the church gathering.

The church is where the body of local Christians assemble to edify one another. They do not gather to listen to a man preach; they do not even gather specifically to worship (there is no NT text which states this - check it out). Christians will worship together because they love God and worship is a key feature of our individual lives (or should be). However, the reason for believers to gather is to edify one another. Count the number of times this is stated in 1 Cor 14 alone. We gather to encourage, edify (build up), exhort and do each other good by sharing together in openness and trust.

Look at Eph 4:11-16. What is the purpose of leaders? It is to do themselves OUT of a job. They are gifts given by Christ to the church to equip members to be able to function in the body. When everyone is functioning effectively, the leader's job is done. How does the church grow? It grows when each part is functioning alongside the next part. Paul explains this further in 1 Cor 12. Each member of the body must function according to its nature, an eye must

see and not try to walk like a foot. As each part works properly, the whole body grows and moves forward. The job of each member is to manifest the gift which Christ has given to them in co-ordination with everyone else in the body. As all the members function in harmony and unity, they manifest the Lord Jesus effectively.

The church must be a testimony to Christ. If the focus is upon a man, it is impossible to see Christ. Christ can only be seen corporately. It takes the body to represent him because he is so great. Even a great man can only minister one person's gifting. The whole body shares many gifts from Christ and is thus a better testimony. Any church restricting the expression of the body thus restricts the testimony of Jesus Christ. Focus upon men is, therefore, evil. It minimises God's testimony and detracts from his glory.

Focus on forms rather than reality

So much in church meetings are forms of expression that have no life. We must not encumber meetings with items which have no Biblical sanction. The list of such wrong forms is endless. Some examples will suffice. Vestments of leaders have no NT authority. The church meeting must testify to the unity of believers not establish demarcation lines. In any case, 'priestly' garments are old covenant not new, they have been abolished (see Heb 7-9). They are a form that damages the body. There is no separation of some privileged class from the mass of the people. The idea of clergy and laity is totally unbiblical. We are all laity, all God's people.

Pulpits, platforms, stages, or a raised dais are to be avoided at all costs. Again they elevate a man above the people. They emphasise privilege and status. Jesus said that the first should be last. There is no status to be given to certain people in body life. In fact, the whole idea of pews in lines facing a man at the front is in complete opposition to the purpose of a Biblical church gathering. Church functions on the basis of *koinonia*, fellowship. It is where this one, then that one shares ministry under the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. Godly leadership is in the hands of a group of equal elders who lead on the basis of character and gift and do not need to be elevated in the meeting.

The idea that a church meeting starts with an hour of vibrant chorus singing, often repetitively, with the back up of a team of professional standard musicians will find no support in the New Testament. Indeed, you will find no mention of musical instruments there at all. Again, complex musical accompaniment is an old covenant procedure. Singing is to be a corporate activity which is centred upon vocal contributions. Songs should be at the discretion of the Holy Spirit, whenever he chooses during a meeting. These songs are initiated, by Him, from the whole congregation, not from a platform

(1 Cor 14:26). The whole point of singing is for it to be a *koinonia* activity where we address, one another as well as God, seeking to build each other up (Col 3:16; Eph 5:19). The idea of one man on a platform selecting all the songs, choosing how they fit together, allowing no interruption between them for individuals to share, is in opposition to the whole tenor of church fellowship activity.⁸

Focus on tradition rather than truth

Traditions are endemic to any group activities which continue for some time. These can be good when based upon Biblical precedent, as indeed the apostles urged (2 Thess 3:6). If our foundation is not the Bible, however, we are in deep trouble (Mk 7:13).

The western church is riddled with traditions of men: why do we have church buildings when there is no mention of them in scripture? Where does a leadership hierarchy come from? Not the Bible? Who established the various liturgies, both institutional and those in the new churches? Not God, he instituted freedom of corporate ministry (1 Cor 14). Who developed the idea that one man can have authority over many churches? Not God. Why is there a worship service lasting an hour in charismatic churches? Why is the sermon the focus of institutional services and charismatic meetings? You guessed it, neither are mentioned in the New Testament as having this prominence. Why is there no congregational participation in most churches? Strange, since it is the basis of Biblical meetings. Why do we have children isolated from family worship in a Sunday school? Why do we have various meetings for healing, evangelism, women, business matters, house groups, choir practices (or even choirs for that matter)? You guessed it - no mention in the New Testament.

What do we see in the New Testament meetings? We notice:

- breaking bread every week (Acts 20:7).
- Open meetings where everyone can share as the Holy Spirit directs (1 Cor 14:26).
- The church is like a family (Eph 2:19), and meetings reflect this, children feel a part of it.
- Women wear head coverings to show their obedience to God's order (1 Cor 11).
- Teaching is given in a way in which people can be involved, ask questions, comment and disagree. (Acts 20:1-7 see the Greek words used).

⁸ In modern western society we have lost the notion of spontaneous, communal singing together, so endemic in the east. As a result, some simple musical accompaniment is often necessary in church meetings to facilitate corporate singing; however, the NT emphasis is on unaccompanied singing, and this was the practice of the early church for over 200 years.

- Sermons are not used in the church for teaching and discipling but are used for Gospel preaching.
- Leadership is in the hands of men only, not women, expressed in a group of equal elders (Titus 1:5).
- Spiritual gifts are shared as God leads (1 Cor 12, 14).
- Giving is mainly used for relief of the poor (2 Cor 9).
- People know each other deeply, care for each other, serve each other, bear each other's burdens (see over 50 'one another' texts).
- Older women disciple younger women in loving their husbands, bringing up children and making a home (Titus 2:3ff).

Is your church like this? If not, what reasons do your leaders give for it being different? Is the Bible relevant to them? To what degree must we obey its commands?

If we were to focus upon the truth as it is in Christ Jesus, these sort of anomalies would not arise. The people must be disciplined into truth because it is only truth which liberates.

Manipulation of the body instead of liberation

Everyone should learn how easy it is to manipulate people from a platform (yes, I have experience of doing this), especially if the person in leadership is held in some esteem. We should also realise how easy it is for such a person, no matter how sincere, to be diverted from a pure motivation into a false purpose, led by the enemy. Time and again I have seen this happen.

If Satan wishes to attack a congregation, what better technique can he have than assembling large numbers into a hall, making them submissive to a man on a platform during a prolonged worship time, making the people suggestible by repeated singing standing up for an hour, and then tempting only one man, instead of hundreds, into a false position so that he can lead many astray (Matt 24:11). This methodology is dangerous. Experts in the field of hypnosis have examined videos of charismatic celebrations and explain that the methods being used on the audience, however unwittingly, are basic hypnotic techniques. Who led leaders into this situation? Not God.

We have seen that the job of leaders is to release the body into ministry. Why is this not happening? Today we have more resources available than ever before. Teaching videos, cassettes, books, seminars, conferences and so on abound on every hand and yet many are realising that the church is more deficient in Biblical knowledge than at any time since the Reformation. Why? Leaders are not doing their Biblical job. They have focused the people's attention on wrong things like: emotional experiences, building projects,

supporting a large (full-time) ministry team, underwriting an organisation etc. The much vaunted Charismatic Movement has been underway for over a third of a century. The Toronto movement has been operational for over three years, with all its promised revivals. Restorationism has been developing (and declining) since the mid 70's. Massive, expensive, evangelistic campaigns have come and gone. What is the end result of all these things? Overall decline in the population of church-goers. Fewer people (in the U.K.) go to church now than they did 20 years ago. Where is the fruit?

Only a release of the body into ministry can accomplish Biblical results. How did the early church evangelise the Roman Empire - Christians were disciplined, taught and let loose to sacrificially evangelise their friends and neighbours. They did this without planning, organisation, advertising, hiring halls, organising dramas, setting up Christian rock groups and so on. Growth comes when the body is working (Eph 4:16). Why is the Chinese church growing at a staggering rate without enough Bibles, with no money and in the face of persecution? The body is active. Believers are trained effectively, in house churches, by unknown leaders and let loose into society. Millions are being converted each year. When will the church in the west learn, at least from its mistakes if not from the Bible?

A footnote here needs to be made regarding another failing of the church - the lack of Biblical discipline. Tolerance has been a politically correct virtue for some time but recently the church has taken this on board also. We never see 'tolerance' as a virtue in the Bible at all because we are not meant to be tolerant in the way the world uses the term. In fact we are sometimes told not to tolerate certain things. For instance the church in Thyatira was condemned for tolerating the teaching of the false prophetess Jezebel (Rev 2:20). The world often uses the word 'tolerance' to cover holding two contradictory positions at the same time. Opposing issues are tolerated not resolved. God never does this. He acts on the basis of truth. If a certain position is right, then the reverse of that is wrong and must be opposed.

In the church today this has come to affect sinful conduct. Christians who sin publicly without repentance are tolerated and not confronted. Rarely is anyone disciplined (when did you last see someone formally 'delivered unto Satan?'). People also feel free to 'church-hop', i.e. wander from one church to another without any commitment, taking from all and giving to none. Leaders are so anxious to increase their numbers that they seem oblivious to quality. Rarely are new members questioned as to their previous behaviour in another church.

The poor conduct of many believers is too obvious to need proving here. Many Christians feel free to regularly get drunk, swear, carouse, defraud

employers and so on. Where is the discipline on this? Gross sin, blasphemy, stealing, gross doctrinal error, immorality and drunkenness are just a few areas requiring expulsion from the local church (if there is no repentance when confronted). The scriptures are very clear on this indeed (e.g: 1 Cor 5:11-13). The church will not get right until it has learned to apply Biblical discipline. Fear, as well as grace, was an important feature of New Testament church life (Acts 5:11; 1 Tim 5:20). If leaders do not discipline, then sin spreads (1 Cor 5:6).

Widespread acceptance of false charismatic trends.

False Prophecy

We would do well to heed the words of Jeremiah today:

**An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land:
the prophets prophesy falsely ... my people love to have it so, but
what will you do when the end comes? (Jer 5:30-31)**

Jesus warned, specifically, that many will come to him at the end saying that they prophesied in his name but they were sent into condemnation (Matt 7:22-23). This alone ought to make us very careful about prophecy. We cannot deny that genuine prophecy occurs because we are told not to despise it (1 Thess 5:20). Paul placed no time limit on this. Deuteronomy (13:1-5, 18:20-22) gives clear warnings that prophecy which fails to occur is evil, and prophecy which comes to pass but which leads the church astray is also evil. Both are condemned and action is required by Christians in these cases. In fact, God says here that false prophecy is sent to the church to test his people.

Far from heeding these commands, national and international leaders have given 'prophecy' after 'prophecy' which have both failed and led the Lord's people astray. Instead of being disciplined, these men continue to hold authoritarian sway over many churches and influence many other leaders and Christians. The repeated failures of 'prophecies' by Gerald Coates, for instance, have been written up in many places, including national newspapers, and yet he is still lauded by many Christians. Following this type of example, charismatic churches are full of 'words from the Lord'. Most of these are foolish imaginings of the flesh, but some are evil. There are many stories of people whose lives have been destroyed by following a false prophecy from one of these people. One American 'prophet' singled out a nineteen year old high school kid in front of eight hundred of his peers and declared that he was into pornography. Despite the boy's tears and protestations of innocence, the man demanded repentance. The poor boy was, in fact, truly innocent and suffered badly. Eventually there were

apologies but the damage was done. Instead of this man being disciplined, he was defended in this action by an international theologian!⁹

These modern prophets deny scripture when they say that the tests of a prophet are not those stipulated in Deuteronomy. 'Prophet' David Ravenhill of the Vineyard movement says, '*I believe the test of a prophet is not whether his word comes to pass, it's his lifestyle*'.¹⁰ This statement is enough for anyone to conclude that the man is dangerous and unbiblical. In fact, he is well known and trusted internationally. What is worse is that in many cases, the lifestyle of the prophet is even worse. There are many cases of lying, fraud, immorality, occultism and worse amongst such men.¹¹

Many of the much heralded 'true' prophecies do not stand examination, and there are several cases of outright distortions of the truth. The book, *Some Said it Thundered*, by David Pytches, publicised the infamous Kansas City Prophets, yet his mentor, John Wimber warned him not to publish the book and stated that it contained nearly 20 factual errors regarding prophecies. It did not prevent it from being a best seller. There are a growing number of books and pamphlets identifying the serious errors of modern day 'prophets'. Charismatics owe it to themselves to read these and reconsider their position. The time has come for these charlatans to be denounced and for a Biblical perspective to be given the church by its leaders.

False Leaders

The prominence being given to so called *apostles* is a seriously worrying trend. The damage done by a false prophet tends to be spontaneous and instant. A word is given, it proves false and damage is done. The damage done by false apostles, on the other hand, is continual and debilitating. These men hold universal sway over thousands of people in a totally unbiblical manner. Nowhere in the Bible do we see men have the type of authority held by these modern leaders. Even Paul had to *plead* with the Corinthians, a church he had gathered, to correct wrong practices. He argued his case and sought their obedience. In fact Paul described his ministry as being like a nursing mother:

But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children. [1 Thess 2:7]

In fact, many of these men have authority over churches that they haven't even built. Some of them have never built a church on their own, and yet

⁹ See: Hank Hanegraaff, *Counterfeit Revival*, p76

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ The clearest example of this is Kansas City Prophet: Bob Jones. See, for example, Clifford Hill, *Blessing the Church*, p 194.

exercise government over very many congregations. The word of the apostle in these groups is law. He hears from God for everyone else and all must keep in line. Again this is totally unbiblical.

The leadership of the local church is solely in the hands of a group of elders who work as a team with no senior pastor. There is not a single scripture to suggest that one man should dominate a church, let alone a group of churches. God's people have sought a king instead of the Lord. As a result of this rebellious attitude, they have got what they wanted - a Saul to rule over them. There may be a few victories at first, but the sad end is assured where God's instructions on government are ignored.

A false system of worship that is based on emotion and experience instead of the truth.

Again, Jesus' words in John's gospel emphasise that worship must be in 'spirit and truth' (Jn 4:24). If there is no truth, how can we be certain that the spirit in which we worship is of God?

This means that the Word of God must have a central place in our times of worship. Now I do not feel that this necessarily means a formal sermon taking the focus. Usually, this occurs after worship is said to have finished. People are not involved, it is not interactive and often, these days, it is simply an opportunity for a leader to offload his set of presuppositions or forthcoming agenda.

The sermon became the central part of church services during the Reformation. This was vital in days when people had been starved of God's word for centuries. The only local Bible was locked in the church building and was written in Latin. Yet, for all my love of the Reformers, they did not radically deal with church life. Teaching was excellent but church practice was compromised. As such, teaching dominated the church meeting. We cannot deny that much good has come from this when good teachers are present - but even in good churches, this can lead to a focus on men not God. Worship is where we focus on God in Christ.

So, it isn't good enough to tack on a sermon to a meeting and say that worship is, therefore, involving truth. No! The word must be prominent in the communal worship of the saints. *Koinonia* worship must include the word as central. How can we do this?

Well, firstly, we must allow the Holy Spirit to be sovereign. Since he is the Spirit of truth, he will bring forth contributions from the word as pleases him - if we allow him free access through each other, i.e. body ministry. I

Corinthians 14 shows that this can take various forms: encouragement, exhortation, Bible reading, prophecy (i.e. a present application of the word with authority, not a new revelation), inspired singing based upon the word, or practical examples of the truth in daily life.

Secondly, all this depends upon freedom in the meeting for all to participate. Leaders should not be the focus but act like fathers in a family. They take responsibility, guide, correct and ensure that everything is decent and in order- but they do not continually speak and dominate.

Thirdly, this can only occur where leaders have trained and disciplined their people to be ready to participate and understand the moving of the Holy Spirit. This is the preparation for ministry spoken of in Ephesians 4. Leadership's key role is to equip to serve, to bring every member to be able to function wisely.

Finally, where the Bible or Biblical doctrine is being expounded in the church, there should be room for feedback. It should be as interactive as Jesus' ministry. There should be scope for questions and answers. People simply do not take in much of the sermon and remember even less. If the preaching was not relevant to them either, then that morning was wasted. Feedback will ensure that the teacher learns to scratch where people itch. People must be fed and nurtured. They must eat what is suitable and relevant. This enables the congregation to participate in the teaching. This is truth in *koinonia*.

Now the Charismatic Movement, which once emphasised many of these things, has settled for an inactive congregation with ministry dominated by platform leaders. Celebration style worship has gradually taken root in most local churches because that has been all that is modelled. The explosion of body ministry in the 70's has settled into a cold formalism. People, desiring to experience God in worship, have settled for good feelings produced by extensive singing of linked choruses (often without wisdom), with no opportunity for participation or ministry. This is just what happens in cults and false religions. Long periods of singing or chanting to produce a passivity with pleasant psychological overtones. There is little place for truth in all this unless a good worship leader brings it into the platform leading - but even that isn't enough. God wants active participation where truth is shared: first by one, then differently by another and another.

Emotional tingles produced by flowing worship songs are basically soulish. It touches the affections which are part of the soul. Traditional services with impressive architecture and melodic choirs stimulate religious feelings in a similarly soulish fashion. This is why non-believers can come away from such meetings very moved. We need more than this in worship. Singing must

move on to mutual participation, verbal responses to the Holy Spirit's moving and reflection together upon what God is saying. We must move above soulish worship and restore worship in Spirit and truth.

For we are the true circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh.

(Phil 3:3)

An ecumenical spirit that compromises the truth

It seems significant to me that in a key passage where Jesus prays for the church, he prayed specifically for believers to be sanctified (separated) in the truth as well as that they should be one (Jn 17:17-19, 21-23). The closely connected verses end in the desire that the church should thus represent God to the world and testify to Jesus the saviour. Jesus implies that there is a glory attached to this. Like it or not, unity involves truth. If truth is compromised, unity is impossible. Nothing is more certain to forfeit the glory than despoiling the truth or hindering *koinonia*. Only by understanding and promoting God's word (which is the truth, Jn 17:17), as well as living in a demonstrable unity, can we hope to glorify God.

As the church dwells in unity, God promises to bless his people (Ps 133). As we understand doctrine, God sets us free to demonstrate his purposes (Jn 8:32) as true disciples of Jesus - the one who wholly manifested God.

John is frequently cited as the Gospel of love, yet it also mentions truth 27 times, nearly four times as much as all the synoptic gospel mentions put together. John continues this theme in his letters mentioning it 20 times. This is 36% of all the references to truth in all the letters. Truth seems to be high on John's agenda and he was the closest to Jesus, the beloved disciple.

Now life should bind us together, that is true. Those in the same family should be closer than anyone else. The body of Christ should be united. We gather around him. He is the source of our life. But we cannot compromise truth because Jesus gives it a high priority. It is his word. We gather in his name, not the name of some group or denomination.

If someone in a family disowned the family name, how could he legitimately embrace family occasions? We have God's word as a sure guide to our faith and practice. Where there are areas of uncertainty, we can be patient and tolerant with each other. However, where the clear word of scripture is forsaken and replaced with a practice of men, we cannot embrace those who teach it as truth. It is John who endorses this sanction (2 Jn 10).

Some erroneous church groups have genuine believers present. This is obvious. We can only feel sad and pray for such to have wisdom to see the

truth which is being compromised. But we cannot formally join with such a church, even if many believers are present, because that would join us in their heresy, as John makes clear.

In recent times this principle has been overturned as a result of common experiences. The use of charismatic gifts and what is called 'Renewal' in the churches has brought a growing unity between evangelicals and churches which deny cardinal Biblical teaching. This is at best unwise and at worst, dangerous. Christians should not throw out truth in order to enjoin in fellowship. We are called to avoid contact with evil teaching and not fellowship with those who teach it or support its promulgation.

False Extraordinary Phenomena

Altered states of consciousness

It is becoming trendy in Christian circles to give clinical sounding names to odd experiences in order to cloak them with respectability. *Altered States of Consciousness* (henceforth ASC) is one of these titles. If we called it being 'spaced out', 'stoned', 'under the influence' or in a 'mystical trance' no doubt it would be less honourable, but just as accurate

What is an ASC? The human body is capable of more than two states. Besides sleeping and waking it could be in a trance induced by hypnosis or drugs for instance. It could be in a conscious but ecstatic spiritual state (e.g. 2 Cor 12). It could be dreaming or drunk. It could be in a coma. These are altered states from that which we are used to experiencing. These can affect our thinking processes and perception of reality (hallucinations can occur). Time can seem to stand still. Release of inhibition is typical and self control can vanish altogether. Emotions are heightened, sometimes intensifying sensations of the environment. Usually the physical body is affected to some degree: dizziness, heavy or lightened limbs and tingling sensations are common. The imagination is usually intensified and is easily convinced that God or some other 'higher power' is at work. To this is added the danger of being more than usually open to suggestion.

It annoys me that the same folk that condemn young people who seek this state at a rock concert or a rave, are often the same people who are desperately seeking something at religious meetings that offer the same feeling.

ASC's have been around from the beginning. All religions, especially Oriental, have adherents that develop this effect. Intense prayer or meditation can produce it. It can also be produced by certain bodily controls (e.g. rolling the

eyes back or trepanation¹² for instance). In mystical religions and sects it is actively sought by various means (e.g: yoga, mantras, mandalas, chanting, drugs, fasting, exhaustion, intense concentration, repetitious music, whirling etc.).

It is something that happens to the consciousness as a result of a specific experience. Sometimes it is a natural consequence of a deep and genuine experience of God, as such it can be stimulated by God and used for good. However, it can easily be initiated by Satan and used for evil.

The main point is that the experience itself is no evidence of God at work. It may accompany a work of God, but it may be the Devil. Christians who emphatically state that God touched them because they had an ASC ought to be more careful. The motivation and the fruit will make clear the origin.

We are not to seek experiences for the sake of the experience itself. If an ASC accompanies a move of God, fine. We see them in the Bible, but we must be aware that Christianity does not have a monopoly on this experience. If the Devil can convince some that he is an angel of light, then I am sure that he can give someone an experience which seems spiritual but, in fact, puts them under his control.

A more Biblical phrase for an intense spiritual experience is to 'be in the Spirit'. Men of God were certain of the origin of such experiences, which also bore fruit that God was in control. (For example John in Rev 4:2). Also scripture talks about visions of the Lord that seem to be a similar experience e.g. Paul (2 Cor 12:1) and Ezekiel (Ezek 1:1). The '*hand of the Lord falling*' upon a person (Ezek 8:1) is yet another example; or seeing God's glory (e.g. Stephen, Acts 7:55).

I have no doubt that these men of God were in an ASC during these times - so what? It matters nothing. If we knew that such experiences of God produced fluttering eyelids, should we seek to have fluttering eyelids or do we seek more of the God that met with these men? Should we try to emulate their physical manifestations or their faith. Hebrews 11 gives us clear guidance on this matter.

The current passion for experiences is to be deplored. Such manifestations should not be criticised when they are part of a godly walk with the Lord, but the seeking of a physical experience is a poor substitute for knowing God. It is to be especially avoided if the ASC is transmitted by another person (e.g. through the laying on of hands), just to have the 'blessing', i.e. some anonymous experience. This is exactly what the cults practice and is a means

¹² Drilling holes in the skull to release pressure on the brain and induce altered states.

of inducing demonic control. God never leads a man to lay hands upon another in order to pass on an emotional experience. We are told, by Paul, to rarely lay hands upon people (1 Tim 5:22).

Being slain in the Spirit / Resting in the Spirit / Falling under the power

At the outset it has to be clearly stated that there is no Biblical evidence for this practice at all. Scripture gives no example of saints falling backwards and lying prostrate for a time in order to receive God's blessing. No matter how much apologists for this struggle to defend it, the Biblical precedent is absent. The only people slain in the Spirit in the new Testament did not get up again. Their names were Ananias and Sapphira.

It is true that the experience has occasionally accompanied the ministry of some godly men in history. They did not seek this, but without doubt it, nevertheless, occurred. We should notice, however, that most cases happened when the Gospel was being powerfully preached and those that fell over were sinners under conviction. There are, however, many others whose ministry was very questionable, and the piles of 'bodies' on the floor after their meetings are a cause for concern.

Some critics have used the lack of Biblical evidence to reprove those that expect this sign to follow their ministry. However, these same people often have many unbiblical things accompany their own ministry, which they seem blind to, and are subsequently equally criticised by defenders. For instance: these people tend to be Reverend this that or the other, yet Jesus told us to take no leadership name of authority over others (Matt 23:8); they are usually the sole pastor - yet scripture clearly states that the church is to be led by a plurality of equal elders (Titus 1:5, note plural); some wear vestments and dog collars which is a feature of Old Covenant religion and is in antipathy to the New Covenant teaching on the priesthood of all believers (1 Pt 2:9); some christen or baptise babies, a practice without Biblical precedent (it is disciples who are to be baptised- Matt 28:19); many ignore the gifts of the Holy Spirit when we are told not to despise them (1 Thess 5:20, 1 Cor 12:31,14:1,39); many churches fail to practice breaking of bread week by week despite apostolic precedent (Acts 20:7). We could go on. The point is that our criticism is weakened if our arguments backfire on us. We should all be seeking to become totally Biblical and put our own houses in order, as well as contending against error. Some critics have responded in a fashion that is worrying and ungodly (for instance: some of the fanatical and abusive anti-Toronto web-sites on the Internet).

So how do we judge this matter?

It must first be repeated that believers should not search out this experience for its own sake. We are discouraged by scripture from seeking powerful experiences; we are to seek the Lord. Saul prophesied in a dramatic way, but it did him no good and was no gauge of his spiritual condition. It has troubled me to witness young people repeatedly go to the front of a meeting to receive this experience, despite showing no signs of reverence for God in the remainder of the service. It was clear to me that they treated the experience like a drug, as the effects wore off they went up for more. The leaders seemed quite happy with this and showed no accountability for the spiritual condition of the youths. This is deplorable.

Secondly, the experience is no proof that something special has occurred to improve the spiritual, emotional or physical condition of the recipient. If it was of God, it would be an indication that God wants to begin a work in a person, not an indication of something finished. For instance, if conviction of sin causes a sinner to fall down under consideration of his offending God, then he needs to repent. Yet I have seen unbelievers receive this experience, to the joy of believing friends and relatives. As a result of what was understood to be a dramatic move of God, there was no felt need to counsel the person in God's requirements in salvation. There was no true evidence of conviction of sin or repentance, let alone faith or a love for God. The person was, despite this, completely accepted in the church as a believer simply because he had fallen down. The result - the individual later completely fell away, when the euphoric after-effects disappeared. His occasional social contact with the local church led to their concern for a 'lapsed sheep', rather than a soul needing the Gospel. The experience inured the person to further witnessing. This is serious. Conversion results from the work of God in a person's heart producing repentance and faith. The fruits of this are godly sorrow for sin, love towards Christ and a desire to please God. These fruits are observable, at least after conversation. Nothing less should be accepted as evidence of conversion.

The experience on its own is not enough to distinguish it as a true work of God; indeed it has tended to nullify a proper discernment. Other faiths and cults have experiences identical or similar to this and are patently false. The true test of experience is the word of God and discernment, based upon revelation by the Spirit of God. The fact that someone falls over as a result of prayer, or even touch, means nothing without further examination. We must not be satisfied with this on its own.

The recent charismatic craze for esteeming men because they are able to induce this, almost on demand, has more kinship with Shamanism than Christianity. Such practitioners frequently have an appalling grasp of theology and an even worse teaching ministry. Some have been publicly denounced

for serious heresy and yet are still favoured by thousands of believers unaware of the danger (see H. Hanegraaff: *Christianity in Crisis*).

Regarding meetings, the keyword is decency and in order. This does not mean sterile efficiency or boring traditionalism. There may well be a fervent boiling in the Spirit at special times (Rm 12:11), but the Holy Spirit will still produce order. When a situation prevails that prevents any Biblical ministry we should be concerned. This cannot be of God; the Holy Spirit is with us to edify and encourage, not cause chaos. If the preponderance of bodies keeling over prevents the Holy Spirit from working in the scriptural pattern, then something is obviously wrong. If this happens regularly, then the enemy has fooled that congregation into spiritual slumber or worse. I know of a church where the spiritual temperature is judged by the number of bodies on the floor. At times virtually everyone is on the floor. Week by week the Sunday evening service is marked by capsized people. It is significant to me that the ministry of the word is deplorably absent in this church. It is also a concern that it has an authoritarian leader who displays absolute power.

Recent research has clearly identified the close connection between being 'slain in the spirit' and hypnotism. Apart from the connection to the occult, false religions and New Age cults, even stage hypnotist/entertainers can exactly reproduce all the effects seen in charismatic meetings, including blowing on people causing them to fall over. The key factor is the suggestibility of an audience softened up by the preparation of excitement, induced passivity during a long period of repetitive singing, expectation and reverence for the man on the platform. The difference is that hypnotists know what they are doing and debrief their victims after the stage show to prevent post hypnotic recurrences. Charismatic leaders do not, because they deny that it has any connections with occult techniques like hypnotic manipulation, and many victims suffer afterwards, e.g. drunken behaviour. There are reported cases of Christians being arrested for driving a vehicle in an intoxicated state as a result of being 'slain in the spirit'.

More saddening is the fact that many people have been injured, some seriously. There are now many documented accounts of people damaging themselves in the fall. I have heard of one fractured skull, several broken wrists, and one damaged back causing an old lady to walk with a stick. Other problems seem to result: depression, instability, damaged spiritual lives, incoherence, unstable physical behaviour - even at work much later, and tragically, reports of suicides are now surfacing. The fact that this experience is spreading rapidly tells us a lot about our time.

This brings us back to the Bible. The fact that there is no reference to this activity is sufficient for us. It is impossible to defend this practice Biblically.

Many have tried and utterly failed, some of the attempts are so ludicrous as to cause one to laugh aloud (See Hanegraaff: *Counterfeit Revival*). Biblical saints did not experience this effect, but many ardent adherents of false religions and cults have. Consequently, we should totally avoid such practices and condemn those who seek to perpetuate it.

Uncontrollable raucous laughter

There are some indications in the Bible, albeit slight, that laughter sometimes accompanies a move of God to an individual. (See Gen 17:17, 18:12, 21:6; Eccles 3:4; Job 8:21; Ps 126:2; Lk 6:21; of God see Ps 2:4, 37:13, 59:8). There is some testimony in history to the same effect.

There is no doubt that laughter is a tonic for emotional stress in itself and it seems quite normal, to me, for God to give grace, accompanied by laughter when it pleases him. As with other manifestations, the Devil is quite adept at mimicking these signs, so all the normal safeguards must be kept in mind, especially order in church gatherings.

Again there is no scriptural indication that we should seek laughter, for itself, and it is rare in the Bible. It should certainly not be a pre-occupation of a church meeting and widespread outbreaks of uncontrolled laughter in a meeting do not fit this pattern. The real problem is the unbridled nature of the laughter seen in many recent meetings. Anything which is unrestrained or uncontrollable is dangerous. If self control is a fruit of the Spirit, then something which removes our self control cannot be of God. The sight of many people falling about laughing is not decent and in order and is more compatible with cultic experience than Christianity. Unrestrained laughter is a significant feature in the practices of many sects, the occult, false religions and drug abuse.

Riotous braying, crowing, barking, roaring etc.

These manifestations are altogether different. There is absolutely no scriptural precedent for these as an evidence of a work of God. Knowledge of cults and eastern religions, however, shows that this sort of behaviour is far from unusual, and this should alert us immediately.

Behaviour of this sort has also been historically attached to demonic pagan manifestations, particularly where passivity or release of inhibitions has been encouraged.

The touchstone is: how can this possibly glorify God? Can we imagine Jesus doing any of these things? We know that he cried. Although there is no account of Jesus laughing, it isn't hard to imagine it. We certainly know that

God laughs (Ps 2:4, admittedly used metaphorically). By no stretch of the imagination can any righteous person impute braying or crowing to God. How can we entertain this at all? Why do not more churches condemn such behaviour than those encouraging it?

It is sobering to reflect that even the Pentecostal pioneers, so esteemed by those in the current move which tolerates this behaviour, rebuked people that acted like this in public meetings and prevented any excesses from disturbing the service. Aged Pentecostals deploring current excesses have recalled Smith Wigglesworth and George Jeffries acting against such unruly behaviour. Uncontrolled excesses have always been criticised and halted by godly men throughout history, especially by the same revival leaders appealed to by modern charismatics in support of these excesses like: John Wesley, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, Daniel Rowland, Peter Cartwright, Watchman Nee, and Jessie Penn-Lewis. In fact, some Toronto Experience apologists are guilty of serious misrepresentation of historic writers.¹³

Bouncing / Pogoing / Shaking etc.

Again it is a cause for concern that these physical exuberances are common in the cults and false religions. Shaking hands are often associated with enraptured passivity or concentrated ministerial actions in cults like witchcraft and religions like Hinduism. Again there is no Biblical precedent and no encouragement to perform like this.

How much further must we go to see Christianity become more and more like paganism.

Screaming.

The presence of a person screaming is always disconcerting or even frightening. Most Christians would associate this with the release from demonic control but this is not the only instance where this occurs.

Screaming has been frequently seen in history, particularly in times of revival.

¹³For example: Guy Chevreau, in *Catch The Fire*, p209, quotes a 'letter' of Daniel Rowland to Whitefield, describing extreme behaviour resulting from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, to support his case. He stops the quote at the point where it then describes this behaviour as unruly, he omits the part where the maniacal conduct requires their friends to tie them with ropes, he doesn't tell you that they burned themselves, he neglects to tell you that their state is called 'miserable'. Furthermore, the quote is from a newspaper report, it is not from a letter of Rowland. In fact the section is introduced by the biographer as examples of spurious emotionalism and religious excesses which Rowlands and the other Methodist leaders condemned. [Eifion Evans, *Daniel Rowland*, Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, (1985) p155-158. Chevreau even repeatedly misspells the authors name!] Various authors have similarly misrepresented Jonathan Edwards.

When God has sovereignly revealed the weight of a person's sin to him, screaming is a most natural thing to do when afraid and can be a sign of true conviction. We should be grateful that God does not deal with men like this all the time. How many of us Christians could stand before God without a deep awareness of our failings? Hopefully, this will not appear too often but we cannot dismiss it out of hand. Screaming can accompany conviction of sin.

Screaming is a release. A person screams when they have come to the end of their tether and can repress their feelings no longer. Screaming can therefore be therapeutic or associated with a release from some tension or another. The most obvious is release from demonic infection of some kind. Scripture shows that exorcism can involve screams. But other matters can also yield with screaming, for instance: pent up rage. I have witnessed a mature lady find release from deep emotional hurts in a sovereign way by God during ministry. It was not sought (though God had been asked to bless and meet needs). It was short, piercing and accompanied healing.

A final note must be made about deeply entering into the heart of God over issues which grieve him. Sometimes, folk are gifted with a deep spirit of intercession and closely identify with God at an intense emotional level. They then feel the pain of God over certain issues as the Holy spirit directs. We see something of this in the prophets. If the atmosphere is right and the church is intimate in relationships, such a person can give vent to this feeling in a number of ways. I have seen this released as loud groans and cries. This at first disturbed the meeting, but as it was explained by the person so affected, the congregation entered into the heart of God together and a wonderful work was achieved, many finding release as well as a fresh vision of the Lord. No doubt Romans 8:26 comes to mind here, the normal comments on which fail to do justice to the intensity suggested by Paul.

Having said all this, again the key issue is that of decency and order. Such expressions will be unusual and must be controlled for the sake of all, especially children. Hopefully, such expressions would not accompany a family meeting anyway. Elders must carefully distinguish true from false experiences and seek to protect the flock. But we must not categorically deny that such behaviour can indeed be of God.

False Practices

Laying on of hands / Impartation of the anointing.

Firstly, there is a clear warning not to be hasty in laying hands upon anyone (1 Tim 5:22). Some would restrict this to ordination of elders but Paul doesn't say this; and although he speaks about elders in close context, there is a

natural break in the previous verse which seems to conclude his words on eldership. Paul then mentions various items. In any case, the warning is a fair one to apply to various situations, ordination or otherwise. The New Testament identifies the laying on of hands in the following ways:

- with healing (Mk 16:18; Acts 28:8)
- miracles (Acts 5:12, 14:3, 19:11)
- receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17-19, 19:6, 9:19)
- ordination to ministry (Acts 6:6, 13:3)
- expression of fellowship (Acts 13:3)

The logical conclusion is that Paul is warning Timothy to be careful to hear God before proceeding in any of these matters. That is the first thing to notice: caution and slowness must proceed with this. Is not this where modern Evangelicalism is failing badly? Everyone seems to be ready to lay hands on anyone at the drop of a hat in charismatic circles. This is obviously incorrect.

Secondly, the impartation of either blessing or cursing is primarily by speech in the whole Bible. There are occasional references which might obliquely allude to this practice but only one (in connection with Jesus' ministry) where it can be noticed clearly. Everywhere else blessing results from vocalised ministry (Jam 3:9-10). We have no precedent to swiftly and thoughtlessly lay hands upon others to impart blessing in the way that is currently popular.

The laying on of hands is not seen in scripture to be for the transmission of ministry or what is called 'anointing'. Even when Elisha received Elijah's mantle, it was given to him by God not by Elijah, who protested the idea (2 Kg 2:10).

The only places, I have found, which suggest impartation are as follows:

- **Romans 1:11** but here the likelihood is that Paul is talking about the fruit of his teaching ministry and the reception of the Holy Spirit. His reference to *strengthening* most likely implies teaching.
- **2 Tim 1:6** Timothy received a gift as a result of Paul laying hands upon him. However, this is probably referring to Timothy's ordination as a minister in Paul's apostolic team; and immediately Paul tells him to not be afraid of testifying, preaching, the Gospel (v8). The reference in 1 Tim 4:14 supports this conclusion as it is a clear reference to Timothy's induction.

There is no indication, therefore, that Paul generally laid hands on people to pass on an 'anointing' or a spiritual gift.

The anointed one is Jesus, the Messiah. The anointing is specifically related to the Messiah in typology (Ps 133) and actuality (Acts 2:36, Heb 9:11). The anointing is the promised fulness of the Holy Spirit falling upon God's

promised anointed one, the Messiah (Greek = *Christ*), Jesus (Acts 10:38). The anointing is referring to a **he** not an **it**. It refers to the Holy Spirit. How can he be manipulated by mere men?

We are anointed because we share in the fulness of Christ, who is the fulness of God (Col 2:9-10). Because we are *in Christ*, and because he is the anointed one, we share his anointing, share his unsearchable riches, share his inheritance. The gifts of the Spirit flow from this anointing for instance. The only verses which talk of Christians being anointed are as follows:

But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him. [NKJ 1 John 2:27]

Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God. [NKJ 2 Corinthians 1:21]

Both these texts imply that being in Christ is the source of the anointing. No other NT texts talk about Christians being anointed and certainly none teach that Christian ministers can spiritually anoint other Christians.

Again this pernicious teaching, which leads to all sorts of perverted practices, arises from a superficial reading of scripture; false deductions made from poor judgment, following bad historic practice and erroneous theology. We must be careful whom we lay hands on. We must be slow to do so. We can only act this way at the instigation of the Lord. In practising this we must be careful to divert attention from ourselves and seek to direct the focus towards God. The act is one of identification with the body. The laying on of hands by responsible members of the church is to identify the recipient with God's community, and hence with God himself. In the same way the OT sinner was identified with his offering before it was sacrificed. He became identified with the animal who then suffered for his sins.

The laying on of hands is not a technique for transferring power in the church. It is again a feature of the cults and foreign religions, many of which utilise the technique for a transferral of demonic forces from an adept (leader) to an initiate (new member). Once more we see the trappings of paganism forcing their way into the church of Christ whilst not only do Christians fail to see it, but also they defend such practices against critics.

Praise Marches and Territorial Spirits

How can millions of people marching through city streets praising Jesus be wrong? How can attacking enemy strongholds be wrong? Surely it is

unnecessary pedantry to criticise them?

Firstly, again we must examine the Bible and see whether this is advised or practised. The answer is a resounding no. References to Jehoshaphat or Joshua are not linked to these practices at all. There is not New Testament instruction or practice to do these things; neither do they feature in apostolic strategies for evangelism.

Secondly, praise and worship to God is something that Christians do in private. It is not a public spectacle. Christians maintain an attitude of praise, inwardly, in all that they do. It is a giving over of our lives to God (Rm 12:1-3), a submission to his character and purpose. It is something deeply personal and intimate, not shared with outsiders. When the church worships, it does so behind closed doors. Outsiders may be invited in, but it is not done as a public event. Christian corporate worship was conducted in homes, where the church met in the New Testament. Jesus even said that we should shut the door when we pray. The point is that prayer and worship is a private family event requiring no distractions. Walking down a city street is not a suitable place for such things. We should also carefully consider the words of Jesus not to cast our pearls before swine or give what is holy to dogs (note that the word *dogs* can also mean a man of impure mind! Matt 7:6).

Thirdly, we should understand that these practices *do* work against Biblical principles. Praise marches are inclusive by their very nature, one gathers to do this as a corporate act of unity with many others whose beliefs and practices may be completely unbiblical. Your testimony is affected by inclusion with them. For example, praise marches have included Roman Catholic orders (monks and nuns) carrying idols of Mary and chanting her praises. This is blasphemy. Every believer participating in such a spectacle seriously compromised their witness. I have also seen people of well known sinful character join in with such carnivals, to all intents and purpose part of the assembly, and welcomed. This also damages the witness of Christians partaking in it.

What is played down by the organisers is that praise marches are motivated by spiritual warfare strategies. The purpose is not unity of Christians or public witness, the main purpose is to challenge demonic strongholds over cities. This is part of the *territorial spirits* teaching that emerged from South America and was popularised by people like C. Peter Wagner and endorsed in the UK by Gerald Coates and Roger Forster. It stipulates that evil spiritual forces have taken over towns and large urban areas ruling them to evil purposes. Evangelism in such areas is ineffective until these strongholds have been overthrown. When successfully combated, by corporate prayer and worship, the demons' hold is broken and evangelism will be successful. Social

situations will also develop more successfully. The real problem with this is that demons do not rule anywhere. God is in complete control of the earth, which belongs to him in all its fulness (Ps 24:1). Demons can only tempt or afflict people as God allows within his eternal purpose. The book of Job is a clear explanation of this. How much more is this true since the cross, when Jesus completely triumphed and despoiled the enemy (Col 2:15). The proof of the pudding is in the eating. The many marches and spiritual warfare sessions, in some towns, have done nothing to increase the number of converts or halt the social deterioration.

God has clearly revealed his method of evangelism in the New Testament. It is by the simple preaching of the Gospel. Even in the most demon riddled cities, (like Ephesus) where idols were everywhere, the method did not change. Paul regularly preached God's word and saw a powerful church arise.

It is significant to me that churches are trying one new methodology after another to try to make converts, and all of them are failing since church membership nationally is dwindling. Yet the Biblical method, which is also proven to be the most statistically effective practice, is also dwindling - sharing the Gospel with friends and neighbours. Many charismatic Christians have become so immersed in the activities of their churches, attending so many meetings, that they gradually lose their non-Christian friends, the very ground from which fruit will arise. Effectively sharing the Gospel with friends at home is how to see people converted. Non-biblical events like healing meetings, praise warfare, praise marches, combating territorial spirits, guest services and so on have been proved to be ineffective.

Marching in worship

Though less in vogue now than it was in the late 80's, no doubt it will still rise up to fool gullible people again. In all these things it seems to me that Christians in the late 20th century seem unable to rest satisfied with the person of Christ and the full provision of his salvation. If we would simply dwell upon the wonders of his sovereign elective grace and predestined providential preservation of our lives we would have enough to give us cause for wonder and amazement for years. Instead we drive ourselves from one fad to another that yields instant gratification. One external prop follows another to help rev up our dwindling spirituality.

Worship must be in spirit and truth (Jn 4:24). This is a command as well as a statement of fact. We worship God in our spirit. It is by our spirit that we commune with the almighty. The external trappings of life may be involved (joy, posture) and this is quite right. Our whole nature is to be part of our

expression of praise, but we worship in spirit and truth.

Worship is the contemplation of God whereby we offer ourselves wholeheartedly to him without reserve (Rm 12:1ff). It is to be an attitude of life as well as an expression in praise in the body of Christ. Worship is not the place for warfare. Worship is not a martial thing. God may direct people to praise and focus on him and give deliverance at the same time (as in the case of Joshua and Jehoshaphat), but it is not the worship that deals with the enemy, it is God. Worship is not a technique to be manipulated individually (for personal success) or corporately (in spiritual warfare). Our focus on God in worship no doubt leads to a heightened trust in his sovereignty, and in this we should rejoice; but the sword of the Spirit is the word of God, not worship. Directing people to consider warfare against the enemy by marching around the building is to divert attention away from God. Worship is attracting attention towards God.

It would be bad enough if it was just mental attention being focused on the enemy, that in itself is out of place in worship; but to encourage long lines of worshippers marching around the room with outstretched arms in marching pace to 2/4 strident music has nothing to do with the praise of God's people.

This is just another foolish practice which a theologically weak people have fallen victim to. It seems that the more strange practices are taken on board, the easier it is for yet more stranger practices to appear. Again decency and order would restrain such behaviour in the church of God, but sadly few seem to know these days what reverent worship is.

False Roots

There is a growing trend, throughout the world, for people to locate their historic roots and celebrate them in some way. In most cases this is very difficult due to the continual invasions of different tribes and cultures resulting in very mixed races. The modern church has fallen into this same worldly trend, seeking security in a supposed ethnic foundation other than Christ. Sometimes this is very confused, as in white American Christians celebrating their Native American Indian roots! I will not spend too much time on this since I have written on both the ethnic roots mentioned elsewhere (*Modern Celtic Spirituality* and *The Current Focus Upon Israel*).

Celtic Roots

This fad is particularly English and fairly recent. It first emerged from the *Pioneer People*¹⁴ team-leader Roger Ellis and his presentation *New Celts*.

¹⁴ The ministry organisation led by Gerald Coates.

Again this follows a powerful worldly trend which is currently celebrating (and selling) all things Celtic. It has nothing to do with the genuine work of God amongst the Celtic Christians in Britain after the removal of the Roman garrisons. Those Bible based saints would abhor what is being done in their name.

The basic idea is that the church has followed a model of organisation of constraint and restraint established by both the Roman church and the Reformation. What is needed is a more subjective religious experience which has a great place for the supernatural gifts of the Spirit, and especially signs and wonders. Great store is put in symbols and mysticism, and even asceticism, at the expense of God's word.

The apologetic used for it is confused, erratic, unbiblical, and even amusing if it were not so serious. Roger confessed to me that he is no theologian, nor a historian. In this he spoke the truth. A foundation for various practices is based upon the lives of the Celtic saints. Unfortunately, these were written hundreds of years after their deaths and are full of legends and myths. They are no basis for drawing Christian experience from. In fact, many of the conclusions of the modern Celtic aberration, are diametrically opposed to what we know of the genuine saints like Patrick, whose *Confession* is one of the very few original Celtic documents.

The results of this teaching are very dangerous. Waving a prayer stick covered in feathers or ribbons in a worship time is endorsed. Superstitious practices are admired. False role models like Boadicea are presented. Wrong theology like Pelagianism is accredited. Much of the practices really stem from an anglicised, new age, Toronto type experience. Subjectivity, mysticism and occultism are given free rein by falsely drawing from history. What is amusing is the idea that the English are all Celts and should fall back on Celtic roots. The reality is that very few English people could even hope to trace the minutest drop of Celtic blood in their veins. Even Ireland, the land which produced most of the great Celtic saints, would find it difficult to locate genuine pure Celtic families, such has been the incursions of invading tribes over the years - note for instance the Scandanavian influence in surnames. In all this, Christ and the Bible are downplayed to the point of near invisibility. This alone should warn us of the great danger.

Jewish Roots

In Great Britain there was a significant reaction against the Toronto Experience. One of the main strands of this attack came from people whose foundational reason for this was eschatological. Their Premillennialism (often dispensational) reacted against the triumphal Postmillennialism which

supported the whole Toronto idea (it is also a feature of many charismatic streams, especially Restorationism). Basic to their idea of the end was the vital part played by Israel. As Toronto gathered steam, three groups, which had already emerged before Toronto, began to assert themselves, often in opposition to it. These three groups are: Messianic Jews and their supporters; Prophetic Word Ministries, led by Clifford Hill, and their supporters; and another strand pushing *Jewish Roots*, perhaps best exemplified by Jacob Prasch. Each has developed its own apologetic, and each often criticises (or even condemns) the others (although some representatives have managed to straddle the lines).

The subject is too large to develop here, but, since it is a feature of modern Evangelicalism, it must be mentioned briefly. While all focus upon Israel and completely miss the teaching of Galatians, Colossians and Hebrews, they each have their own distinctives. They all tend to use Jewish terminology to a lesser or greater extent, they call Jesus - Yeshua, they use Jewish names for the festivals like: Hannukah. Some only refer to God as Yahweh and even say that Greek terms like Lord (*kurios*) or God (*theos*) are blasphemous. Messianic Churches now involve many Gentiles who are happy to be called *Goyim*, and who attend 'synagogue' on a Saturday, call their pastor 'Rabbi' and some men have even been circumcised. One national Messianic leader even wears a phylactery and encourages his Gentile people to call themselves by Jewish names.

Other pro-Israel groups (like *Prayer For Israel*) have wisely condemned such extreme behaviour and written against it. Even converted Jews, from a strict orthodox background, have shown the fallacies of claiming to be Biblical Christians and submitting to such legalistic Judaistic rites. [One can be concerned for God's purposes in Israel and motivated to pray for and witness to Jews without submitting to such errors.]

While not going as far, PWM has emphasised the need to understand the Bible in a Jewish way. To help Christians do this it has even set up a Hebraic conference centre to help people grasp the Jewish roots of the New Testament. This is not just developing an understanding of first century, Jewish, cultural conditions, but (following writers Bivin and Blizzard) insists that the New Testament (or at least the Gospels) was originally written in Hebrew, not Greek, and that to understand it properly we must discover the original Hebrew, meaning. The fact that there is not an iota of evidence for this does not seem to trouble them. Neither does the strong arguments against Bivin and Blizzard's thesis given by Hebrew and New Testament scholars.

Jacob Prasch has condemned this thesis, but then presents his own

interpretative filter. To him, the new Testament can only be understood properly by understanding Rabbinical Midrashic techniques. Western hermeneutics¹⁵ have obscured the original subtle meanings which now need to be rediscovered. He especially hates the Reformation, which he claims has engineered many of our current problems, and even laid the groundwork for the holocaust.

The foundation of many of these fallacies is a misunderstanding of Paul's argument in Romans 9-11. While declaring that God will still do a great work amongst Jews in the end, he explains that not all Jews are of the original stock. Only a remnant of Israel will be saved. This is in keeping with many Old Testament prophecies. The root of true Israel is the faith of Abraham (which was in Christ). Both Christians and the Jewish remnant arise from this stock. Abraham's faith was in Christ, just like us. He relied upon God's grace and trusted God's word. As a result he was justified by faith. The root of the church is not Israel. Rm 9:1-13, 11:1-24 cannot be soundly interpreted to say this. The root of the church is Christ.

All of these are signs of the enemy's subtle deceptive strategies being marshalled for the end. He lures people into an extreme position by drawing them out into a false experience or teaching. He then lures others, who have identified this error, to go to a different extreme, equally false. The only safeguard is to remain close to the Bible; we need nothing else. God has inspired the Bible to be self contained. It explains itself. This was a prime feature of the Reformation. We do not need external philosophies and ideas to interpret the Bible, it is self contained. We do not need priests or Rabbis to help us meet with God, we are all priests in Christ. Anything which encourages you to lean on something other than Christ and God's word is to be mistrusted. Ministries are given by the Holy Spirit to the church to help believers be equipped (such as teachers), but these will always lead people to focus on Christ and develop a love for the word of God. Anything which says you need something additional to know God properly like: midrashic interpretation, a non existent Hebrew NT text, the Old Covenant law and all it's rituals, practices and feasts, are lies. The Holy Spirit, sent by Christ himself, leads us into all truth.

Gender Roots

We have briefly touched upon the issue of feminist ideas which have invaded the church since the 60's, resulting in unbiblical leadership following worldly ideas. However, we should mention a recent movement which is a reaction to this but is even more dangerous. This organisation is *Promise Keepers*.

It is very dangerous because it's deception is subtle. To many good people, it

¹⁵ Rules of interpretation.

seems to be a neutral movement, solely motivated to wake up men. In it, men fellowship together in very large gatherings (up to 70 thousand at a time in America), and covenant to support one another and serve God. What is wrong with that? As usual, the roots of a thing give the game away. The roots of *Promise Keepers* are New Age influences. One of the books recommended for serious reading is Robert Hick's, *The Masculine Journey*. This contains material which is virtually pornographic and very similar to pagan fertility cult teaching.

A most significant problem is the effect of PK groups. These meet in interdenominational settings where men can assemble to stimulate one another to godliness. Meetings regularly involve: charismatic Christians, denominational believers and unbelievers, Mormons, Roman Catholics and Jehovah's Witnesses. In fact, PK books are the only 'Evangelical' material sold in Mormon bookshops. Resulting from this is a growing ecumenical feeling far more powerful than the formal ecumenical movement. In this context we should note that, in late 1997, the PK leadership amended their statement of faith to accommodate Roman Catholic ideas on Justification by faith, by removing the word: *alone*.

In the summer of 1997, a very significant coalition was cemented. Three of the major USA Reformed denominations formally unified with a major Lutheran denomination. The coalition now represents 10 million Americans. How did this major change take place, are there not serious theological differences between them? The reason given, by the leaders, is that their people were already meeting together in PK gatherings (along with Mormons etc.) and it seemed logical to formalise a unity which had taken place at grass roots. This is further affected by the compact which the Lutheran denomination involved had already signed with the Roman Catholic church.

Revelation shows very clearly, no matter what your interpretative view of eschatology, that the end will come alongside a united, apostate, world church arising out of a deceived true church. Is this the beginning?

False Counselling Trends

Since the 1970's there has been a growing importance given to counselling ministries in the church, or para-church organisations. It is now common to see leaders who are called *counsellors* who have no other task in the body. Many ministries have arisen which do nothing else. Some of these have conference centres advertising week-end or all week counselling sessions for the needy. Surely this must be a good thing? Are we not to care for one another?

Firstly, again we must look to the Bible to establish clear principles in this area. Here we see no church office of *counsellor*. The pastoral needs of the body are to be overseen by the Biblical leaders, who are elders. There is no other 'official' shepherding ministry. Obviously, believers will minister to each other as they bear on another's burdens and admonish one another. Developing elders will no doubt be better at counselling than others. Nevertheless, the control of pastoral problems lies only with the elders. The buck stops with them. The qualifications of these leaders are primarily spiritual, not professional, and their technique is the wise application of Biblical truth to situations. There is no question of externally qualified and trained personnel taking over this role.

Secondly, there is no other place for Christians to develop than the body meeting together as the local church, in its various expressions. It is here that problems are dealt with, not in some clinical atmosphere of a professional psychotherapist. Needy family members are dealt with in the family, the church.

Thirdly, the foundational resource for sorting out problems is always the word of God, applied by ministers of God (not necessarily elders). Worldly opinions as to underlying causes or various therapies find no place in the Bible. God's word has been sufficient to meet men's needs for thousands of years until very recently. Now it needs the application of psychotherapy to resolve deep personal issues.

Nowhere in the New Testament do we see a focus upon problems in the way we see it today. There are no counselling techniques offered, just the application of God's word in a love relationship. The early church membership was outgoing and self denying. The modern type of emotional problems did not seem to arise. I am sure that where there is a godly leadership in a Biblical church with saints zealous for God, most of the modern problems vanish away. This is not just conjecture, I have seen it in action. Most modern psychological problems, which supposedly require psychotherapy, tend to arise where people feel isolated, rejected, unused, introspective, purposeless and abused. Sound Biblical churches provide the antidote for all these things since they focus on Christ and people (not issues or leaders), and endeavour to release all the saints into a functioning ministry which God has ordained. Where people join a church with a background of significant abuse (e.g. wife beating), which obviously calls for special treatment, then the elders will work especially for that wounded person in whatever way is thought necessary; probably in tandem with local social services and surgeries.

One significant problem with all counselling practices is an unhealthy pre-occupation with the self. Such a focus is unbiblical and self defeating, no

matter what immediate short term gains may appear. Christians are never commanded to centre on themselves but are told to look to Christ. Jesus himself told his followers to deny themselves on several occasions. Such a reversal of Biblical procedures goes hand in hand with a watering down of sin. Instead of dealing with sin, people are often told that they need to feel good about themselves.

On one occasion a friend had to minister to a very emotional, distraught woman. She had received all sorts of counselling to no avail. She was deeply unhappy and inconsolable. The self focus therapies had done no good. He probed into the background of her circumstances and discovered that she had walked out of her marriage to please herself. He explained that this was sinful and that her problem was that she was guilty before God. With a sigh of relief she acknowledged that this was correct and was then able to ask God for forgiveness and repented of her actions. Immediately peace began to flow in her life once more.

A married couple came to me once with all sorts of problems. She was riddled with various pains and stress that had no medical explanation; he felt guilty and depressed but was unsure what the cause was. After a long time of questioning, I realised that the wife was taking all the responsibility in the home. She controlled the finances, organised all family ventures and dealt with all the responsibilities. He was a good man, but not very confident in these areas. I counselled them that this was not living Biblically, and together we developed a strategy so that the husband could gradually take control of the family circumstances, with some training. This he did successfully. As soon as the decision to do this was made, his depression vanished, as did all the wife's aches and pains. They did not recur.

Both these examples would horrify modern 'Evangelical politically correct' counsellors, but they brought Biblical truth into the crisis and resolved the problems. This is the function of ministry, to apply God's word. Only truth can bring freedom. *'The truth will make you free'* (Jn 8:32).

A final word must highlight the sorry fact that most counselling techniques and training derive, sometimes distantly, from the teaching and practices of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. Christians should realise that much of the psycho-analytical methods, used widely, are being debunked by modern investigators and authors. We now know that Freud, for instance, was a liar who fraudulently supported his discoveries. Just a glance at their teachings should warn Christians to keep away from such godless men. But in addition to this they leaned heavily on occult techniques like mesmerism (hypnosis), channelling, regression therapy and blatantly sinful suppositions. Jung was openly into the occult and proclaimed that he had a demon who guided him.

The church has no need to take on board the techniques of the world, even if they work. Yet Christians have openly accepted the techniques of these men which are false, sinful and occultic, and used them to make needy people dependent upon them. A friend of mine was told that he needed counselling for at least two years for there to be any hope of inward change in his life. He declined. A few weeks of life in a Biblical church has already brought significant change to him and his family.

There is, however, another variant of this counselling fad which has nothing to do with psychotherapy. This is the specialist charismatic counsellor. Such men ought to have *danger* tattooed on their foreheads. Again there is not one iota of Biblical foundation for such a ministry, especially one which focuses on exorcism, as most do. The horror stories, now public, are too staggering to report here. Men like this find it all too easy to manipulate needy people who come to them for help, often lonely women. Such emotionally disturbed folk will only too readily tell them whatever they want to hear in order to, subconsciously, please them. There is no safeguard of the church, no superintendent, no governing body and, as a result, there has been flagrant abuse of needy saints by manipulative men. Some may have been sincere; although even this seems hard to believe in the cases I have seen and read. These abuses, which include sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional manipulation, extortion (some have led to suicides) arise because of this wrong focus on counselling as a technique or a separate ministry. The Bible knows nothing of this. The resolution of problems is in godly ministry in the local church.

The Place of the Charismatic Movement

The 50's and 60's saw a rise in strong Biblical teaching taking root in the British Christian scene. The Banner of Truth had begun to make solid historical books cheaply available. Many discovered the riches of the Puritans for the first time for the cost of a paperback. Spurgeon's sermons and his characteristic strong stand against downgrade in the church became an inspiration to many. Preachers of the stature of Martyn Lloyd-Jones, John Stott and Jim Packer became household names. Shortly after, there was an explosion of Biblically based teaching materials. Study Bibles, commentaries, dictionaries of all sorts, theological works and audio tapes flooded the Christian market. Conferences to cater for all tastes emerged to cater for the thirst for truth.

As this momentum gained force, a new dimension was added. The Charismatic movement was born in the mid 60's after the experiences of David Wilkerson and Dennis Bennett. The Pentecostal thrust began to make

major headway into the historic institutional churches. The rest, as they say, is history. At the close of the millennium, what can we say is the fruit of nearly forty years of charismatic teaching and practice?

The best way to do this fairly is to draw from accredited statistical information available from a variety of different sources. In the current UK church scene we can observe:

- Church numbers are in consistent steady decline.
- Giving to Christian charities is greatly reduced.
- Fewer missionaries are sent out than ever before.
- The social situation has declined so greatly that there are growing fears of complete social breakdown and rising anarchy.
- Scandals in church leadership, particularly charismatic churches, are greatly increased.
- Charismatic para-church organisations have grown in power, influence and finances.
- Sin in the nation has grown in frequency and character. Some violent crimes seen in recent years are without precedent in recorded history.

Need we say more? Any historical church movement, which originated from God, always impacted the surrounding social order, if only by it's testimony to truth in the face of unbending persecution. Often, the social order was effectively changed. What is worse is that the Charismatic Movement has regularly claimed that great social changes have occurred or will shortly occur as a result of some charismatic action like: prayer walking, praise marches or spiritual warfare. Revival is always round the corner, but never here.

The inevitable conclusion is that the Charismatic Movement has not only failed to improve the church or the social situation, it has actually contributed to the downgrading of real spiritual values, compromised practical ethics, failed to effectively preach the Gospel so that fewer people attend church than previously and minimised the dependence upon the truth of God's word. However, what it has significantly achieved is the elevation of a number of leaders to positions of great power, influence and (in some cases) wealth.

CONCLUSION

It is not my intention to suggest that the Christian life is an intellectual exercise requiring its adherents to be academics. The problem is that we are not looking at our Bibles as carefully as our forefathers. To assist dogmatic understanding, our ancestors composed catechisms and creeds to provide a formula, or skeleton, of Biblical teaching. This was often in response to some current heresy. Many great leaders of the church composed their own to help their flock e.g: Spurgeon, Martin Luther. They wanted even the simplest of

people to be able to understand the truth and refute heresy. To avoid catechisms and creeds, on the basis that they provide grounds for division, is to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Our people need to learn truth. Formulas may not be everything and may provide opportunities for other problems, but we must not shun helping our people understand God's word. The dangers of party spirit can be warned in the teaching. Openness to yet more that God will reveal in his word as we mature can be encouraged. Stilted following of men's ideas can be advised against. It has recently been noted that the Westminster Shorter Catechism was written for children, and yet contains statements that have recently puzzled theology college students - how weak have we become?

We must protect our people; that is the first duty of a shepherd. Error may be slight at first, but error progresses. If we do not check it, we will gradually be led further and further from the truth. Historically this has happened frequently, both in individuals, schools, churches and seminaries. It started with an acceptance of evolutionary theory or questioning the inerrancy of the Bible or over-emphasising the ministry of the Spirit at the expense of the word but ended up in full scale apostasy.

Today, it seems to me that few have a reasonable grasp of doctrinal truth. Few have looked at a creed, catechism, confession or systematic theology. Fewer still strive to learn truths systematically from the Bible for themselves. Most are dominated by the latest paperback or wind of change in church experience. Some only listen to what their autocratic leaders say and trust nothing else, never questioning (nor are they allowed to) what they hear. Yet the Bible tells us to test what we hear:

Test everything; hold fast to what is good, abstain from every form of evil. (1 Thess 5:21)

This is all the more important because we are specifically told by Paul that the end would arrive after a time of gross deception and delusion that comes upon people who refuse to follow the truth (2 Thess 2). We must rely, totally upon God's word to us and only follow practices which it endorses.

Finally, we cannot but notice, not only the growing worldliness of the Evangelical church in western nations, but worse, the gradual paganizing of it's meetings. Many of the charismatic errors noted here have direct parallels in occult religions, shamanism and mysticism. The church is becoming like false religions. Indeed, this should not surprise us if we study Revelation, where we see a church united with the world system under an antichrist who emerged from the church, joined with counterfeit religion run by by the false prophet, and wholly under the control of Satan. True saints in these times suffer persecution. Are we ready for this? Sinclair Ferguson recently stated:

We face the alarming possibility that there may already be a

medieval darkness encroaching upon evangelicalism ... The possibility of a new ... Pagan captivity of the Church looms nearer than we may be able to believe.

(Evangelical Times, Oct 1997)

We must look hard at our Bibles and learn what God is like. Only then can we hope to be able to understand the times and judge the reliability of what we see around us. God is faithful. His purposes are sure and eternally fixed. His people can always trust that they will know grace to help in time of need. The formal outward church may be in decline, but we have every reason to trust in the majestic purposes of our God who will achieve all his will and glorify Christ in a purified church at the end. The tares may be coming to fulness, but the wheat will also. _

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