

Nailing Charismatic Theology

Introduction

In this paper I seek to demonstrate the seriousness of Charismatic (and also Pentecostal) errors of doctrine. The fundamental issue with Charismaticism is that it is unbiblical, not just that it causes serious problems to God's people. Though we could examine the great sinfulness of aberrations, wrong practices, sleazy leaders and so on, in this paper I am concentrating on the doctrinal issues almost totally (I will consider some historical questions too). [To understand more about the detrimental effects of Charismaticism see my book *'The Charismatic Catastrophe'*, available online at the website mentioned at the end of this paper.]

The simple point is that if Charismaticism errs regarding what the Bible teaches, then it cannot be from God and must be condemned. Are the fundamental teachings of Charismaticism Biblical or not? That is the key question.

Now there is a wide range of errors found within Charismatic churches, from the most extreme restorationist, signs and wonders, Word Faith variety, to more modest semi-Charismatic churches that have opened themselves up to Charismatic worship and the Alpha Course. However, one usually finds a progression, in time, from the less extreme to more radical teachings. Here I will restrict myself to what is fairly mainstream and global, though some specific churches would not support some of these tenets. For instance, I will not discuss Pentecostal snake-handling, even though it is not uncommon in certain US states.¹ It is also my intention to be as simple as possible in the investigation of doctrines.

Baptism in the Spirit

The most important doctrine of Charismatics is their interpretation of the baptism with the Spirit. This is seen to be a second work of grace in the believer whereby, through a specific subjective emotional experience, he is given power to witness and ability to receive supernatural gifts, especially tongue speaking.² Believers who do not experience this are considered second class, or at least seriously deficient in their walk with God; though some leaders will deny this, in practice it is certainly the case.

However, the Biblical baptism with the Spirit is not a subjective experience gained subsequent to salvation at all. It is a once-for-all event that took place at Pentecost whereby the whole church was united with Christ and each other. The essence of salvation is first justification but then being united with Christ (adoption), becoming part of God's family in actuality. This was accomplished when the ascended Lord Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit from heaven to fill every elect person and join them to Christ.

For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free - and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. 1 Cor 12:13

For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ. Gal 3:27

¹ In the 1930s this was so common in Kentucky, Georgia, Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina and Alabama that legislation was passed to curtail the activity; but it continued. There were 61 deaths from snakebites in Pentecostal churches between 1934 and 1978. [Burgess, McGee, Alexander (eds.); art. 'Serpent Handling', *Dict. of Pentecostal & Charismatic Movements*; (1989).]

² Tongues were originally the Pentecostal proof of receiving the 'Baptism in the Spirit' ('initial evidence' doctrine) parts of the Charismatic Movement were initially wary to insist on this. However, by 2010 it is again seen as normative.

The Lord Jesus Christ, given all authority, sent the Holy Spirit to be poured out on the whole church upon his ascension and coronation, fulfilling John the Baptist's promise in the Gospels that Jesus would baptise with the Holy Spirit (Matt 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16; Jn 1:33). As John performed a water baptism to symbolise a separation from the world and repentance unto God, so the risen Lord Jesus, actually performed a spiritual baptism that really did separate the elect into a unified body separate from the world and consecrated unto God.

We became part of Christ's body when we were baptised by, or with, the Spirit. We all drink from this same spiritual source as a result of what happened at Pentecost. When a person believes into Christ today, this past experience is made good to them automatically. In the early church this was made effective to different people groups as they became Christians, whether Gentile families (such as that of Cornelius, Acts 10:24-48) Samaritans (Acts 8:14-17), or Jews (Acts 2:1-21).³

The Greek of 1 Cor 12:13 affirms this. 'Were we all baptised into one body' (h`meij pantej eij e`n swma ebaptisqhmen); 'baptised' is the first aorist passive indicative of baptizw i.e. a reference to a definite past event. 'And were all made to drink of one Spirit' (kai pantej e`n pneuma epotisqhmen) 'drink' is the first aorist passive indicative of potizw, 'to give to drink'. Thus this reference is also to a definite act in the past - the inward experience of the Holy Spirit which is symbolised by the act of baptism. [See Robertson's *Word Pictures*.] The baptism in the Spirit is a once-for-all past event, never repeated, but constantly applied to new Christians. It is this that ensures every believer is indwelt by the Spirit.

Thus the claim of Charismatics that this event is not as the Bible explains, but is a repeated subjective emotional experience given to some but not all Christians in order to give them power to serve, is completely fallacious. It has nothing to do with giving supernatural gifts; it is not a subjective experience which people are commanded to seek; and it is not something merely given to an elite.

The Charismatic portrayal of the baptism in the Spirit is entirely false; nowhere in the NT are believers told to seek such a rogue experience. Indeed, irrational, mystical, emotional experiences are condemned; Christian worship is rational (Rm 12:1-2) involving self-control (Gal 5:23).

The sovereignty of God

Charismatics utterly fail to give God his due, both in practice and theology; thus there is a supreme lack of appreciating the sovereignty of God in all things. Indeed, so great is this failure that they actually attribute sovereignty to other things, such as man or even the devil. In short, much of Charismatic theology about God is blasphemous.

In terms of the Gospel, Charismatics assert the sovereignty of man over God. Their Arminian theology, espoused by the vast majority, asserts that man can reject the Gospel and thus has more power than God. Their God is a weak god who ardently desires the salvation of everyone but has no power to achieve this desire since men reject his merciful advances.

In terms of world events Charismatics also reject God's sovereignty. Instead of believing the Biblical assertion that God is Lord over all, and is thus sovereign over every event that occurs in nature and politics, they affirm that Satan is in control of the bad things that

³ The disciples were already believers but they had to wait until their salvation was completed when the Holy Spirit fell upon them. Only after Christ had been received into heaven and crowned was the Spirit sent out upon the church (Jn 7:39).

happen and that a loving God could not possibly cause earthquakes or tsunamis. Thus we find them often praying directly against God's will.

In terms of human problems, again Charismatics reject the Biblical truth that God is Lord over every event that overtakes us; even the loss of our hair (Matt 10:30). Sickness is under God's supreme control and is used for various purposes to fulfil our training in his service. Instead Charismatics teach that Satan causes sickness and that this must be resisted by faith; people are sick when they fail to believe because God always wants us well and prosperous. This fanciful rubbish is nowhere taught in Scripture and there is no record in the NT of a believer ever being miraculously healed, but several accounts of saints that were not.

The truth is that God is sovereign over all things (Job 25:2; Dan 4:3; 1 Pt 4:11). He controls those things which we would consider to be bad as well as the good (Isa 45:7; Lam 3:38). This includes political upheaval, wars and national instability (Jer 25:29; Amos 3:6) as well as natural disasters (Jer 49:32; Job 37:1-12; Isa 29:6). Regarding men, he is absolutely Lord, moulding their days according to his will (Ps 139:16). In the world even the death of a sparrow is only at God's command (Matt 10:29). Finally, in salvation God is not only Lord of it, but is salvation itself (Ex 15:2; Ps 18:2, 62:7; Isa 12:2; Jonah 2:9). Man can contribute nothing to salvation and indeed, can do no good work at all (Rm 3:10-18).

The abandonment of the sovereignty of God is a central failure of Charismatic theology which undergirds almost all their errors. It is a failure of huge proportions and ensures that much of their thinking and practice is unbiblical. Despite having a name for worship, Charismatics come close to blasphemy in their universal denial of God's sovereignty.

The centrality of Christ

Christ is all! Christ is not only the central focus of the believer, in all things, but the church must concentrate upon glorifying him above all else.

And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence. Col 1:18

If a church, or movement, concentrates upon something or someone else, then it is in conflict with God's declared will.

What do Charismatics set their mind upon?

Well some do give the Lord Jesus some attention when they sing superficial emotional songs to him; but this is by no means fulfilling the divine command to give him the pre-eminence. It is no good naming your church after Christ or singing songs that name the Lord, while all the time you are ignoring his law, neglecting his commands to care for the flock, not abiding in him and spending more attention on something else. Most Charismatic churches, in reality, do not centre upon Christ at all but put far more focus upon the Holy Spirit. They pray and sing for the Spirit to come upon them in the meeting; they call for his power so that they may heal and perform miracles, they preach about the power of the Spirit, they give seminars on how to move in the Spirit, they preach about the need to be baptised in the Spirit, the list goes on. The question they ask of others is, 'Are you baptised in the Spirit?' rather than, 'Do you follow Christ?'

Then, they are fixated by power. Everything has to do with power this and power that; power evangelism, kingdom power, healing power, powerful ministry or powerful anointing. They associate the working of power with the operation of the Spirit and thus the fixation upon the Spirit is merely a selfish desire for power. The lust to manipulate

circumstances (healing, miracles, setting people free etc.) is similar to the desire of witches to manipulate nature by spiritual power.

Others speak much about fire. Many Charismatic ministries are named with prefixes or suffixes about fire: Bushfires, Revival Fire, Crossfire, etc. Some early Charismatic theology was nominated by different aspects of explosive fire; thus there were several spiritual experiences beyond the baptism of the Spirit, such as baptism of fire, baptism of dynamite, baptism of 'lyddite' or 'oxidite'. Again this concentration upon fire was associated with the Spirit's ministry to give power.

We could continue in this vein. In truth there are many features of Charismatic theology (and practice) that have precedence over Christ. This demonstrates that it is deeply in error.

The natural work of the church is to so preach Christ and disciple believers that the flock learns about God's attributes (revealed in Christ), grows in Christ to spiritual maturity and thus bears the fruit of Christ (which is the fruit of the Spirit), which is founded upon virtues (kindness, meekness, patience etc.) not fleshly power. The church is to abide in Christ, fulfil the Law of Christ, walk worthy of Christ, manifest the righteousness of Christ and it does this in fulfilling the will of Christ. It is a fundamental mistake to make the essence of the Gospel a focus upon power and centring upon the Spirit instead of Christ.

The office and work of the Spirit

The work of salvation involves the whole Trinity working together. However, there is a clear order and functionality in the outworking of this decree. The Father initiates salvation by the decree of election and the sending of the Son to work atonement; the Son achieves salvation through his atoning work and the Spirit applies the salvation gained by the Son to the elect. The Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son and does not draw attention to himself.

Jesus explained this very carefully in his last discourses with the disciples. He taught us that the Spirit brings the things of Christ to the church and only glorifies Christ, not himself:

But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of me. Jn 15:26

He will glorify me, for He will take of what is mine and declare it to you. Jn 16:14

In the church the Holy Spirit draws attention to Christ and not himself. He speaks what he hears from Christ and brings it as truth to the elect (Jn 16:13). When he brings ministry to the church it is not from himself but from Christ. It is Christ who is to be the focus of the church not the Spirit. When the Spirit comes to the church he comes as the Spirit of Christ.

Now Charismatic churches utterly fail in this matter, as we have already established.

However, another major feature of the work of the Spirit is his drawing attention to the word of God. The Spirit never works without reference to the word. The reason for this is that Jesus is the Word, i.e. the expression of God (Jn 1:1-5) and the Bible is the reflection of Jesus as the Word in literary format. Since the Spirit testifies of Christ and glorifies Christ, he will testify to the word (Scripture); indeed, the Spirit inspired the writing of Scripture according to the mind of God for the purpose of the edification of saints (2 Tim 3:16).

The Spirit applies the salvation that Jesus achieved to the church, that is his job; he brings salvation to God's people; but he does this through the word. The work of the Spirit in the

church is through and by the word of God. This means that if we wish to be spiritual people, full of the Spirit, we need to understand the word and be clear on all its doctrines. Those who follow the Spirit will be doctrinally sound and honour Scripture. There is no salvation without the preaching of the word by the power of the Spirit,

How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!' ... So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Rm 10:14-17

So, the way the Spirit works in the church is not to draw attention to himself but to glorify Christ; in doing this he constantly works by interpreting God's word, the Bible to the elect. Now, if a church does not centre upon Christ and does not consider the Bible and Biblical doctrine to be important, but rather says they focus upon the Spirit, then that church is at odds with God's will and clearly not following the Holy Spirit. If Christ is not the centre of attention and the Bible not at the root of understanding, then there is no Christian testimony in that church. This alone condemns very many Charismatic works.

The authority Scripture

The supreme problem with Charismatics is their abandonment of the authority of the Bible. Now while some leaders have openly affirmed that they do not revere Scripture as being authoritative or necessary, there are many Charismatic churches that have formal statements in their constitution that they honour the Bible as being authoritative. However, in practice today most Charismatics do not yield to the authority of God's word, but set their sights on subjectivism, false prophecy and experiences.

The reason why this is the supreme problem is that if there is no source of absolute authority to establish doctrine and practice, then any heresy and aberration becomes easily acceptable. Unless the Bible is accepted as the objective form of truth and the only source of infallible instruction, then there is no knowledge that can be trusted and no doctrine that is secure. Folk can develop utterly wrong ideas about God, Christ, salvation and so on unless one can fall back on Scripture and prove that their teaching is from God. Heretics are identified by their deviation from God's word; if we ignore this word then we have no defence against Satan's lies.

Originally Charismatics sought to defend their position from Scripture, or rather by their interpretation of it, twisting it to fit their ideas. Many Charismatic churches claimed to be Biblical and identified themselves in the evangelical tradition. However, this is far from the case today where many leaders openly deride Scripture as being dusty and old fashioned, claiming to have direct revelation from God in prophetic form. In reality this 'revelation' is merely subjective feelings which have no authority whatsoever. Despite this millions of people follow them.

Any true movement from God will unashamedly follow Scripture and defend its every choice by reference to God's word. Truth is what establishes righteousness and this is found in Scripture. Christ is the Word and the Bible is the revelation of Christ as the Word. The Spirit always works in conjunction with the word and does not depart from it. If we want to follow Christ and be spiritual, we will be full of the word.

Charismatics, who do not uphold the authority of Scripture in practice, cannot be following God but are led by their subjective impressions into following the enemy. Everyone who refuses to study Scripture will be led into deception.

Sin

Sin is not a doctrine spoken about much in Charismatic circles, apart from their rejoicing in being delivered from it; it is safe to say that Charismatics have very little sensitivity to sin. This is proved by simple observation; Charismatics have no compunction to do unrighteous things without any fear. This can be seen in the things that young Charismatics do, even in church; it is noticeable in their testimonies where there is no mention of conviction or repentance; and it is observed by the world at their gatherings – such as the security company policing a large Charismatic convention which publicly stated that the Christians present were exactly the same as people in secular conventions, committing fornication promiscuously. It is even witnessed in the behaviour and appearance of leaders on platforms, such as prophets who have punched and kicked people (such as Todd Bentley or Smith Wigglesworth), or who have blasphemously claimed to blow the Spirit (such as Benny Hinn) or worship leaders wearing baseball caps and bandannas contrary to 1 Cor 11:7.

While speaking much about holiness, Charismatics have no clue that growth in holiness is accompanied by a growing sensitivity to sin and an increasing awareness of our terrible natural sinful state before God. They also have no explanation for Paul's teaching in Romans 7 which shows that the Christian who is being progressively sanctified is appalled at the sinful state of his old nature which clings to him despite his best efforts until death. [See further in the topics 'Law' and 'Sanctification'.]

Law

Charismatics generally have absolutely no clue about the doctrine of God's law. There is a wide variety of errors regarding this, from the outright legalism of some to the sheer antinomianism ('against law') of others. However, most claim that they are delivered from bondage to law and thus free to do anything they like as they are under grace (antinomianism). Even those who claim to understand sanctification according to Paul in Romans 6-8 are shockingly mistaken in their teaching on law.

The law that Christians are delivered from is the Mosaic Law, the centre of the Old Covenant. When Christ came, he came as the fulfilment of the Mosaic Law, which was temporary and pointed to the Messiah (Gal 3:19). He was the end of it (Rm 10:4), internalising it and spiritualising it in his body so that those who are united with him would, in future, keep the moral principles of this law by the Holy Spirit. Christians are thus 'in-lawed' to Christ, or 'under law toward Christ'.⁴ The principle of law-keeping is not ended for the believer, but made spiritual and empowered by grace. The Christian keeps the law as he puts on the new nature.

The meaning of law is simply doing God's will; those who wish to do God's will must keep God's law. This was enshrined from the beginning in the conscience as the moral law and this has never been rescinded; man is a moral creature who must do God's will. The Mosaic Law, encapsulated the moral law and affirmed it in statutes. The purpose of the Mosaic Law was to formalise the commandments and demonstrate that man cannot keep God's law and requires a deliverer Messiah. Jesus came as that Messiah who redeemed us from the curse of the law and now enables us to keep the moral principles of the law in him by

⁴ 1 Cor 9:20-21, and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law. The literally meaning of 'under law toward Christ' is 'in-lawed to Christ'. Note *Roberston's Word Pictures*, "Not being an outlaw of God, but an inlaw of Christ" (Evans, Estius has it *exlex, inlex*).

the Spirit. Thus the apostles call the moral law under the New Covenant, 'the law of Christ' (Gal 6:2).

What Charismatics (and many others) do is to understand being delivered from the law as being delivered from any form of legalism and law-keeping. So, being without any form of law at all, they feel free to do anything they want and thus sin very easily. It seems that they never read verses such as,

If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love. ... You are my friends if you do whatever I command you. Jn 15:10, 14

And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him. Heb 5:9

Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. I Jn 2:3-4

Blessed *are* those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. Rev 22:14

Indeed, apostolic ministry comprised many commandments as expressions of Christ's law:

For you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. 1 Thess 4:2

That you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Saviour. 2 Pt 3:2

Charismatics fail to grasp that the purpose of salvation is to produce a people who will obey God's commandments and do good works (Eph 2:10). The very purpose of the Covenant being established with us is that Christ's law is put in our hearts and we then obey God's will from the heart:

But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Jer 31:33

God's people are those who treasure God's law in their hearts. Thus those who do not have any consideration for God's law cannot be in the Covenant and thus cannot be true believers.

Being without law means that you will continually offend God, which is the place Charismatics find themselves in. How many are true believers? Going by the rejection of law-keeping and the lack of any fear regarding objective sin, it seems very few.

Justification

Justification by faith is one of the most important doctrines in the Bible; Luther well said that the church stands or falls by this teaching. The Reformation was kick-started by this doctrine, which was brought to light after centuries of Roman darkness. Without justification all sorts of errors claim to be the foundation of salvation: mysticism, legalism, asceticism, formalism, sacerdotalism, sacramentalism, Pelagianism and so on. Justification by faith is absolutely central to the Christian Gospel; however, the Charismatic Movement rarely, if ever, preaches this. You will find Charismatic books and DVDs on all sorts of subjects, some very arcane, but I challenge you to find any that teach the Biblical doctrine of justification by faith properly.

Justification by faith occupies a significant amount of Paul's letter to the Romans, which explains the Christian Gospel. Chapters 4 and 5 particularly describe this. If people do not understand justification, the bedrock of the Gospel, then they will not properly understand anything about Christian theology and will wander in the dark following all sorts of errors. It is vital to know what happened in salvation and what your status is before God. It is crucial to understand how this fits in with God's eternal decree and what the cross actually achieved. In many ways justification is the springboard for worship and service. When I fully understand what Christ did upon the cross and what atonement means for me, then it is easy for me to lay my life down in consecration to God.

Charismatics talk much about the cross but their theology is riddled with errors. There is a great failure to develop a proper theology of atonement, redemption, propitiation, adoption and forgiveness, which is why their theology gets riddled with errors such as Arminianism, Amyraldism, Pelagianism and Socinianism. But there is also a wrong and mystical explanation of the blood of Christ found in many Charismatic and Pentecostal sects. Furthermore, there is a false view of atonement being propounded by modern Charismatics who follow the New Perspective,⁵ which denies that the cross is a penal atonement (e.g. Steve Chalke).

Justification essentially means 'to render righteous' or 'to declare someone to be righteous'. It is the means whereby a sinner is legally established as righteous and enabled to have a relationship with God. I will quote from a previous work of mine to define justification:

Justification is the act of God whereby he declares his elect righteous in time; forgiven, pardoned and delivered from sins and constituted legally righteous before the throne of grace. It was decreed in eternity, for the elect alone, whereby they were considered as 'in Christ'. It was effected in time by the penal and substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus Christ whereby the elect's sin was vicariously paid for by their sacrificial substitute and the curse of the law removed when Christ became sin for the elect.

As well as forgiveness of sin and being declared 'not guilty', the elect are made legally righteous by the imputation (or accounting) of the obedience of Christ to the sinner. This righteousness is the obedience of Christ to every demand of the law in his life.

Justification is by faith alone as the instrument, or means, through which it is effected. This faith is given by God only to the elect. Faith is not the power that achieves justification, or the basis of it, or man's righteousness, but merely the instrument God uses to impart grace. There are no human works involved in this. The sinner's sins do not hinder God's effectual grace, and the sinner's good works (even those under the influence of the Spirit of God at the time of his conversion) do not contribute to his righteousness. The perfect, meritorious work of Christ for the sinner and outside the sinner is the only work involved. God is satisfied with this work.

Justification leads to sanctification in life and immediately impacts the believer as God adopts and accepts the elect sinner into the family of God.

⁵ The New Perspective on Paul is a modern rogue theological interpretation of justification. While there are variations within the movement, the key factors are a new way of looking at Second Temple Judaism, and thus re-appraising Paul's teaching on justification as understood by Reformation theologians; Justification is not concerned with acquittal from sin, or grace versus works, but with being established in the covenant community. In essence, it teaches a new form of works righteousness. Proponents include: EP Sanders, James Dunn, NT Wright, Alan Sugate, John Armstrong, Don Garlinton, Thom Smith, Scott Hafeman, Robert Gundry

It is essential to affirm that the work of salvation is entirely in God's hands. There is no contribution made by man in any sense; even his believing and repenting are gifts by God.⁶ Man does not even co-operate with God in the work of conversion by believing; he receives grace to believe after a work of the Spirit in his heart. So justification is by faith alone, and this faith is a gift given by God as the instrument of receiving justification. When a sinner is declared as 'not guilty', there is nothing he can congratulate himself for, he can but worship in thanks that God called and drew him to Christ. [*The End-Time Erosion of Justification by Faith*, Paul Fahy.]

While Charismatics talk much about the cross, there is rarely any sound doctrinal teaching of what justification by faith really means and consequently very few Charismatics have any understanding about the matter. If you don't understand justification, you are unlikely to understand righteousness and will succumb to legalism. If you confuse justification and sanctification (as many influenced by Wesleyanism do) you will never grow in grace to maturity.

Sanctification

The key to understanding and applying sanctification is to know the truth of Scripture regarding mortification and to understand the role of the Spirit in his work of sanctification in the believer. Failure to understand the doctrines of justification (Rm 5), identification (Rm 6), sanctification (Rm 6-8) and walking in the Spirit will ensure that the believer is a failure in his walk with God.

Perfectionism – the problem of not doing certain things

In general there is a woeful lack of understanding about this doctrine, and consequently there is little genuine holiness amongst Charismatics. Firstly, many Charismatics (and especially Classic Pentecostals) have perfectionist views on sanctification, which they adopted from their Methodist and Holiness predecessors. This has led to variations in perfectionism, or instant sanctification after a special experience. For Methodists, especially Fletcher, the baptism in the Spirit was a special spiritual (read, emotional) experience whereby one was instantly blessed with an experience of perfect love that enabled a person to live perfectly without sin. The fallacy of this is obvious – we are never without sin in this world as John makes plain (1 Jn 1:8); the old nature is not eradicated until the return of Christ and this is the source of sin which remains within us. Indeed Paul explains that the old nature gets worse (Eph 4:22) and this is why Romans 7 was necessary. We all struggle with sin all the time, can never be without it and constantly need grace and repentance. What Methodists did (as did the subsequent Holiness & and Higher Life Movements) was to minimise the importance of sin – a grave error.

Human effort – the problem of doing certain things

Secondly, many Charismatics replace the Biblical doctrine of sanctification with a theology of human works. Holiness to these folk is the result of doing things by human effort, the number of which is limitless. Like medieval Catholics who thought that self-abuse (asceticism) would produce holiness, so these Charismatics perform their various works to become more holy. These include long prayers, emotional worship, being slain in the Spirit (falling over) or fasting. At the worst end of the scale are those who actually believe in sacramentalism – the idea that using certain objects produces holiness or spiritual power. Amongst the list of these include: crystal gazing, lighting candles, blowing ram's horns, being 'knighted' with a sword after prayer or being touched by a powerful leader.

⁶ Jn 6:29; Acts 5:31, 11:18, 14:27, 18:27, Rm 2:4; Eph 2:8-9, Phil 1:29; 2 Tim 2:25-26.

Antinomianism and mysticism – believing the wrong things

There are a few groups who deny the previous methods and claim to believe and teach the truths of Romans 6, 7 and 8 (which are crucial passages for sanctification) but teach them erroneously. Many of them follow the wrong principles of the Higher Life Movement, which approaches a form of mysticism or antinomianism.

What happens with these is that they take the view that all that is needed is a work of faith in the truths to establish holiness; usually this follows some form of revelation about the truth. The believer then stands on this work of faith that he is dead to sin and dead to the law and nothing else is required. In some this results in mysticism whereby the person just feels established by meditating in faith that he is dead and has powerful inner feelings which make him feel spiritual. After his meditation he still goes and sins, but feels no compunction about it. Worse is the antinomianism whereby this ease in sinning is formalised. Such folk proudly affirm that the law is dead to them and so they can sin freely because grace abounds instead to them. They are not under law but grace and so are released from sin's dominion – so they go and sin without reprisal.

I have heard a very famous Charismatic leader (who is supposed to be an authority on this subject) preach about this and say that so great is the release of the believer from law that, having believed the truth of this, he could go out and kick an old lady in the street and there would be no offence to God. This is heretical and dangerous rubbish. I can assure you that not only would God be offended but he would bring chastisement on such a sinful believer to teach him a lesson (Heb 12:6-11); either that or the action would prove the person was never really converted.

The truth

The truth about sanctification is this. The believer first needs to appreciate the doctrine of justification and understand it properly. Through faith he is pronounced not guilty in heaven. Many Charismatics (following Wesley) confuse justification and sanctification, making sanctification dependent upon faith; which leads to various errors.

Then the believer needs to understand that he is legally or definitively sanctified (1 Cor 6:11); this is the past tense of sanctification. The believer is able to sit with Christ in the heavenlies as clean because he has been legally sanctified; his spirit is pure.

Then we need to understand that our bodies will be sanctified only at the Second Coming where they will be instantly transformed to be like Christ's body (1 Jn 3:2; Phil 3:21). This is the future tense of sanctification.

In between these two events is the life we live now, the present tense of sanctification – which is progressive sanctification, an ongoing struggle. The struggle occurs in our soul and this process is called in Scripture 'the salvation of the soul' (1 Pt 1:8-9, 22, 4:19; Jm 1:21; 1 Jn 3:3). The struggle is the problem of choice and the choice is between two natures that exist in our personality – the old man and the new man. Each day we must choose by an act of will which of these to express. Sanctification occurs when, as a result of understanding that the old man is dead to us through the cross, we choose to put off the old nature and put on the new, which lives in our spirit and is the life of Christ in our hearts. We walk in this nature by denying ourselves (denying our old nature) and this requires fortitude and effort. There is a striving, not to obtain holiness (that holiness is already present in the new man) but to deny the old man.

The mistake many make is to try to patch up an old garment with new cloth or put new wine in an old wineskin. You cannot patch up the old nature with fine works – it all

becomes unrighteousness. What is required is to understand that the old nature is now defunct in God's eyes (Rm 6:6; 'done away with' or 'destroyed' in the AV actually means 'made unemployed'); it is given for destruction to be fulfilled at the end, but now it must be put off by determined action based upon faith and knowledge of the truth of Rm 6. Believing Rm 6 is not enough (the mistake of mystics and Higher Life teaching), the flesh must be denied (Matt 16:24; Lk 9:23; Titus 2:12). This denial is a rejection, an abrogation, a not regarding, an abnegation, a disregarding of the old Adamic life followed by a decisive act to put on Christ (Rm 13:14; Gal 3:27; Eph 4:24). So there is striving in sanctification (Acts 24:16), a fight for faith (1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 4:7), but not to be holy (the mistake made by many) since only what God does is holy, the striving is to deny the old man.

In all things the conscience, trained in the truth of God's word, acts as an arbiter to show whether our works are righteous or evil (Acts 23:1; 2 Cor 1:12; 1 Tim 1:5). What the trained conscience is doing is highlighting whether we are following the law of Christ or not. Charismatics fail to appreciate the importance of the moral law and reject all law along with the Law of Moses (which is cancelled as part of the Old Covenant). Believers do follow law, but not Mosaic Law and Old Covenant shadows; they follow Christ's law which has internal, spiritual power (1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2; Jm 2:8). When we err, we must confess our sin (1 Jn 1:9) and repent (that is change our mind to act differently). Thus the Christian walk is one of constant repentance – continually putting off the old man and putting on the new. Those who reject conscience ruin their life (1 Tim 1:19), and of course, many of the aforementioned errors do exactly that. It would be rare indeed to hear a sermon on the importance of the conscience in a Charismatic church.

Walking in the Spirit is the life of a believer who has put off the old man, put on the new man and is empowered by God's spirit to bear fruit. A person who is abiding in Christ will walk in the Spirit. A person who has died to himself will walk in the Spirit and walk in holiness. The Spirit will not be manifest in a person who fails to put off the old nature. Thus the Spirit is seen not in those who have to develop mystical subjective feelings but those who, by an act of will, of choice, have put on Christ.

The covenant

Charismaticism is essentially rooted in the Old Covenant; Charismatic churches of all stripes find themselves locked into practices that deny the reality of the New Covenant in theology and practice. Leadership is based upon Old Covenant hierarchical forms: High Priest, priestly caste, Levitical caste or king, princes, governors, city leaders. In contrast, New Testament churches are led by elders and no one else, following the synagogue model and dominated by apostolic teaching of mutual subjection and mutual edification. Charismatics not only adopt hierarchical leadership but many (especially in Pentecostal circles) even have colourful priestly vestments straight out of the Old Testament. All emphasise an Old Covenant split between the clergy and the laity. Charismatic churches mimic the temple in building large dedicated buildings for meetings, which are even called temples by some. In fact, outwardly, there is very little difference between Charismatic churches and the institutional churches they originally sought to replace.

Many of the forms of Charismatic liturgy are Old Covenant in structure; whether it is the loud instrumental music of rock bands, the predomination of soulful activity (i.e. things that stimulate the soul and particularly the emotions), an emphasis upon tithing, fasting, celebrations, or even dancing. All these are external forms following Old Covenant precedents and fail to appreciate the fact that the Old Covenant has now been cancelled and that all these forms are defunct (Heb 8:13). The New Covenant believer worships in spirit and truth; Charismatic worship is neither.

But the Charismatic Movement also utterly fails to observe the fullness of the New Covenant in theological terms.

Firstly, UK Restoration streams of the 70s and 80s (plus the related US ‘Shepherding Movement’) mentioned the Covenant only in terms of what it meant to them in practical relationships. Though the meaning of Biblical covenant was never preached, nor the several covenants expounded, these Charismatics repeatedly mentioned the term ‘covenant’, but only in connection with their idea of committed relationships. The focus of their method was the subjugation of the flock to certain key leaders (apostles) and their delegates; thus discipleship, shepherding and commitment were constantly mentioned (and books written on it) and the catch-all term ‘covenant relationships’ was coined to imply this subjection. Thus church leaders were in ‘covenant relationship to an apostle, which merely meant that the church leader had abandoned his Biblical role and submitted to a mere man instead of God. A senior church leader was in ‘covenant relationship’ with his elders (i.e. they were submitted to him) and then the flock was in ‘covenant relationship’ to the elders, leader and apostle. So the term ‘covenant was always being bandied about but the true doctrine of covenant never expounded. Most, if not all, Charismatics have no clue what the covenant means and why it is important. This puts them in danger of falling for Dispensational ideas on the Jewish covenant when they come across them in books, which many have done and then relocated into a heretical Jewish Root group.

The New Covenant is the outworking of salvation with those God chose to be his friends. As God sovereignly chose Abram, called him out of Ur, drew near to him and promised great blessings, so God fulfilled all these promises in his Seed, Christ. Christ is the fulfilment of that was promised in the Abrahamic Covenant and the New Covenant is the outworking of all that Christ achieved as Saviour to his people. The New Covenant, then, is union with Christ, a relationship of peace with God, eternal life and all the blessings that accompany salvation. Spiritual union is the outcome of the Covenant; the means whereby God relates to his people, as branches are part of the vine.

This union is experienced as faith is given as a result of the redemption. As faith is the means of justification, so it is the basis of experiencing the Covenant; indeed justification is a primary result of the Covenant. As the Covenant is God’s means of establishing friendship with sinners, so justification is necessary to legally remove the guilt of their sin. Sanctification is another primary result, to make the Covenant people holy. Thus the benefits of the Covenant are the outworking of salvation – regeneration resulting in eternal life, the giving of faith through grace by which the regenerated is converted, justification as a result of faith, adoption as the result of justification, sanctification to cleanse from the pollution of sin, preservation throughout life and the spiritual power to perform good works. The benefits of the Covenant are the doctrines of grace; because God decrees friendship with his chosen people, he decrees their salvation. The fruits of salvation are the outcome of covenant. They were achieved by the work of Christ who is the Head of the Covenant. Thus the Covenant builds the household of God with Christ as Head.

Finally, it is ironic that Charismatics, who champion the work of the Spirit, fail to understand covenant as being the essence of the Spirit’s work. The New Covenant saves because it is worked by the Spirit (2 Cor 3:3). The Covenant is fellowship with God through union with Christ, and this union is established and confirmed by the Holy Spirit. The essence of spiritual fellowship with God is the work of the Spirit in the heart of the believer,

just as in the same way the fellowship of the persons of the Trinity is established by the Spirit.⁷ Fellowship with God is effected by Spirit; communion is enabled by the Spirit,

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. 2 Cor 13:14

Thus the bond between Christians and Christ is the Holy Spirit. As Calvin said, the Spirit is the root and seed of heavenly life in us; the bond by which Christ unites us to himself [*Institutes*, 3.1.1-2]. The Holy Spirit is our salvation. As salvation is Christ, so salvation is the Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ (2 Cor 3:17-18). Regarding the work of the Covenant, the Spirit and Christ are one. The Spirit applies Christ's work of redemption to the church; he establishes the Covenant with the elect and brings salvation by grace. If you have the Spirit, you have Christ. If you have Christ you are part of God's family. If you are part of God's family, then you are in the Covenant.⁸

This unified work of the Spirit and Christ cuts across the whole ministry of Charismatics who seek to divide them in the work of salvation. The whole basis of Charismatic theology is that there is a separation between the first work of grace performed by Christ which saves sinners and a second work of grace performed by the Spirit which gives power and gifts to a few. People can have Christ but not have the Spirit and not have any power or spiritual ministry. This is pure heresy and close to blasphemy. The Charismatic claim that the Spirit has a ministry which is independent of Christ in the church, who gives gifts that are not automatically part of redemption and who sustains a church presence independent of Christ is pure heresy. Apostolic theology unites the work of Christ and the Spirit in the church; Charismatic theology separates them.

We should also bear in mind that the essence of the New Covenant, according to Jeremiah, is the establishment of God's law in the believer's heart, that is the activity of the Spirit to enable the saint to love God fully and love his neighbour as well. Anyone who rejects law-keeping or fails to love God and his neighbour cannot be in the Covenant. Furthermore, the activity of the Spirit in the believer is not to perform healing, miracles and works of power, but to love God and men.

The kingdom

The concept of the kingdom of God in Biblical theology concerns the reign of God. It is the place where God is fully obeyed as a king. In purest terms the kingdom is Christ, who is the only true and obedient Son of the king, in whom the Father is well pleased. But in wider terms the kingdom incorporates all those who are in Christ, those who are submitted to God as king through union with Christ. Thus the kingdom is the body of Christ.

From another point of view the kingdom incorporates all those who are in the New Covenant. The Covenant of God establishes those who have a relationship with God and serve him truly; thus the scope of the covenant equals the scope of the kingdom.

For Charismatics the kingdom means many other things and not chiefly the church.

⁷ 'The fellowship of love in the Trinity is the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father to the Son and from the Son to the Father. The Father breathes forth the Spirit to the Son as his personal love, and the Son breathes forth the Spirit to the Father as His reciprocal, personal love.' David Engelsma (& Herman Hanko), *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, British Reformed Fellowship (2010), p25.

⁸ I acknowledge the benefit of some suggestions from David Engelsma in certain parts of this section from his essay 'The Holy Spirit and the Covenant of Grace' found in Hanko & Engelsma, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, British Reformed Fellowship (2010).

Firstly, those Charismatics who follow Dispensationalism (chiefly Classic Pentecostals) have a very erroneous view of the kingdom, which is limited to fleshly Israel. The kingdom for Dispensationalists is Jewish and will only be fully manifested in a millennial, political Jewish, earthly kingdom. They propose a difference between the kingdom of God (which is current, temporary and spiritual) and the kingdom of heaven (which is future, earthly and Jewish), but in Scripture the terms are synonymous (Matt 19:23-24; Matt 11:12-13 with Lk 16:16; Matt 10:7 with Lk 9:2; Matt 4:12,17 with Mk 1:14-15). Dispensationalists just haven't read their Bible carefully enough.

Secondly, in the original form of UK Restorationism (say, the radical Charismatics of the 70s and early 80s) the kingdom was a catch-all term to promote their version of a regional united church. Thus it referred to the typical organisation of a Restoration community, with church leaders rightly related to an apostle, and the wider church committed to what the apostles demanded. This would be worked out in local celebrations and wider ranging conventions and with all the leaders established in very definite levels of rank under an apostolic team. For them, kingdom meant their cultic version of a submitted church, not to God but to men.

Thirdly, the kingdom for most modern Charismatics refers to the fulness of power salvation, which will be represented in a global, end-time church ruled by apostles, and is present now in a lesser form represented in the power ministry of apostles and prophets. Thus the kingdom chiefly speaks about power religion and the fulness of Christian abilities to work wonders, heal and perform miracles. Thus one hears of 'kingdom ministry', 'kingdom healing', 'kingdom living' in just the same way as one hears of 'power religion', 'power healing', 'power evangelism'. Considering that much which goes by the name of power religion or kingdom living involves acting in disobedience to God's will,⁹ it is ironic that the term 'kingdom' is used since this represents doing the will of God truly. Thus this Charismatic concept of 'kingdom' is actually the opposite of what God teaches us.

Whatever form Charismatics take on the kingdom, we can see that it is, in reality, opposition to God. The kingdom is the reign of God through Christ in the church established by his covenant. We are the kingdom, and the kingdom is continuously established as we obey and serve God in all that we do in the local church and in our practical lives. Regarding the fulness of kingdom privileges (such as sharing in Christ's reign), these are future, not present; for the new world not this dying one (1 Pt 1:5, 13; 1 Jn 3:2).

The Gospel and the doctrines of grace

Everywhere in Charismatic circles the preaching of the Gospel is downgraded. Rarely, if ever, is the Gospel preached in a Biblical way; consequently, there is grave doubt over the validity of the converts that they produce. This fear is borne out in the published testimonies (e.g. in Alpha publications) which are superficial, do not mention any conviction of sin, ignore repentance and usually talk about feelings rather than convictions. It is also evidenced in the large numbers of people who fall away in time and the huge amount of counselling ministries necessary to keep professing believers on track; historic sound churches never had any need of such ministries (which are largely led by women, usually with a professional qualification from heretical secular psychotherapy courses).

⁹ That is by claiming things which God has not given, seeking healing when it is not proper, teaching that kingdom blessings (e.g. healing) come by one's faith and not God's disposition and usurping authority that belongs only to Christ.

Almost all Charismatic churches have a foundation of Arminian theology; some approach the Pelagianism of CG Finney, while others have adopted the near Socinianism of Open Theism. Others claim to be sound but have adopted the errors associated with the New Perspective (NT Wright et. al.), such as Emergent Church leaders who have abandoned penal atonement (e.g. Steve Chalke). But even supposed Calvinistic streams, such as those inspired by the late Martyn Lloyd Jones, preach a very unsound Gospel in practice. I have heard a Gospel message preached by a famous leader in a famous supposed Calvinistic Charismatic church that was Pelagian in content ('just fan the divine spark which God placed in everyone'). Others that claim to be Calvinistic are actually Amyraldian. All believe that God loves everyone and that Jesus died for everyone.

In theological terms Pelagianism¹⁰ and Open Theism¹¹ are at opposite ends of the scale to Calvinism. Arminianism¹² (Semi-Pelagianism) is compromise between Pelagianism and Calvinism, while Amyraldism¹³ is a compromise between Calvinism and Arminianism. Calvinism is simply shorthand, or a nickname, for the Biblical Gospel; it could just as easily be called Augustinianism since Augustine taught these same truths earlier.

The essence of the Biblical Gospel is particularism as opposed to universalism. Those who are saved are chosen in eternity (Eph 1:4; 2 Thess 2:13; 1 Pt 2:9), called out in time (1 Cor 1:2; Rm 1:7), Christ only died for these not for all (Matt 20:28; Heb 9:28) and these are preserved to the end (1 Pt 1:5; Jn 10:28). To these God gives grace; he sovereignly regenerates and supplies faith and repentance unto life. Those who are not chosen in eternity are left in their sins to face condemnation in testimony of the holiness, wrath and justice of God. Thus salvation is particular, singled out to the elect and is not universal. God does not love all, he hates some (Ps 5:5; Rm 9:13) because they are cursed (2 Pt 2:14; Matt 25:41) and left in their sins; reserved for this from eternity (2 Pt 2:17; Prov 16:4).

Charismatics generally have no clue about these things, having wandered from the sound Gospel preached by our forefathers. Instead the Charismatic gospel is based upon decisionism and free will. It is centred upon man and not God. It is based upon works and not grace. It is essentially Arminian (to a lesser or greater extent) and heretical. Instead the Biblical Gospel is the work of God towards those chosen:

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. Jn 1:12-13

That the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls. Rm 9:11

'I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.' So then *it is* not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. Rm 9:15-16

¹⁰ Pelagianism essentially affirms that man can save himself by keeping the law. It denies Total Depravity.

¹¹ Open Theism is taught by Clark Pinnock and supported by Graham Kendrick, Gerald Coates and others. It is an extreme form of Arminianism coupled with the denial that God knows the future or controls the action of men. It denies God's sovereignty.

¹² Essentially this teaches that man co-operates with God in salvation. There is a universal atonement provided by Christ for all men, if they will but accept it. The initiation of salvation is by man and the continuation of it also by man, who can fall away. This denies Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace and Perseverance (the 5 points of Calvinism).

¹³ Amyraldism (Hypothetical Universalism) originally sought to unify Calvinists and Lutherans, or particularism and universalism. Today it is a compromise between Calvinism and Arminianism. It teaches that God loves everyone and that Christ died for everyone (universalism) and anyone can be saved if they believe; but in the end only those chosen by God in eternity will actually believe.

Salvation is of the Lord (Jonah 2:9).

Common Grace

Like most modern evangelicals, Charismatics believe in the teaching of 'Common Grace'; however, our forbears knew nothing about this as it did not arise until the 19th century with certain rogue ideas of Dutchman Abraham Kuyper. Kuyper was a Calvinist minister who strongly affirmed particular grace but later strayed from the path when he left the ministry and entered politics. Seeking to find a theological defence for uniting with Catholics and the secular world in order to found a Christian commonwealth, he developed the theology of common grace, and admitted that it was historically novel.

Building on this error, subsequent theologians have established common grace as a principle teaching, though the term is never found in Scripture. One of the fruits of this teaching is the idea of a sincere or well-meant offer in the Gospel to all. Compromised Calvinists have used this to teach a universalism in the Gospel, and some Charismatics are in this group. What this does is to claim that God loves everyone and that Christ died for everyone and all can be saved if they believe. One can see how close this approaches to Arminianism.

The big problem today is the fight of modernists to claim that God has a loving disposition to all, is good to all, is benevolent to all, that he restricts sin in the world, that he looks on men with favour and that he empowers all men to do good things that are acceptable to him. This is common grace and it is a lie. The truth is that God's love and grace are only directed to the elect. Grace only arises from the cross and the cross is only effective for the elect. God's attitude towards the reprobate (those not elect) is not benevolent or favourable but one of hate (Ps 5:5; 11:5), not of mercy but of condemnation (Jn 3:36), not of grace but of justice. Sinners cannot do any good work that is acceptable to God at all (Rm 3:10-18) because they are dead in sins (Eph 2:1) and lawless (1 Tim 1:9; 1 Jn 3:4); even their daily work is an abomination to God (Prov 21:4). Common grace is a false teaching.

Baptism

There is some divergence in the theology and practice of baptism in Charismatic/Pentecostal groups. Institutional churches in the UK Renewal Movement tend to be Anglican, and thus would baptise babies (paedobaptism), formally confirming them later as adults; the mode would be pouring or sprinkling. Charismatic Baptists and many others, including Classical Pentecostals, would insist on baptism by immersion on the profession of faith (credobaptism). Both these groups would baptise in the name of the Trinity, which is the Biblical manner (Matt 28:19).

However, there are Pentecostal denominations (e.g. Oneness Pentecostals) and some Charismatic groups that baptise in the name of Jesus alone. This is due partly to an erroneous doctrine of God and partly to misunderstanding the abbreviated form found in some parts of Acts. These usually demand the rebaptism of a believer joining them who has already been baptised. This is absolutely wrong; as there is only one baptism (i.e. of the Spirit Eph 4:5) then there is only one water baptism to correspond to the inner work. Finally, some Charismatic groups do not emphasise the importance of being baptised at all.

These variations point to a lack of Biblical certainty amongst Charismatics. The Biblical view is that baptism should be upon confession of faith (credobaptism) and may be administered in any Biblical manner (sprinkling, pouring, or with less sanction, by immersion). Baptism does not categorically represent being dead and buried then raised

with Christ,¹⁴ but represents the work of the Spirit in salvation, being poured out upon the church and washing away her sins.

Those churches which insist upon a person submitting to one form of baptism alone (such as immersion) are adding a command to Scripture; nowhere does the Bible command that we are immersed. Indeed, a proper study of the word 'baptise' shows that by far the greatest weight of Scriptural teaching and symbolism reveal that baptism is best represented by a pouring or sprinkling upon, not an immersion.

Exorcism

Charismatics make a great deal of exorcism. Indeed, I have heard even very moderate Charismatics, those who condemn the excesses in more radical churches, still affirm the need for exorcism in order to grow in grace and defeat sin. This is usually called 'deliverance ministry' and there are many Charismatics who specialise in this form of service exclusively; indeed there are specialist ministries that do little else and who have great stately homes used for retreats where all sorts of rituals are performed on the weak and gullible. In one case a BBC documentary team exposed a famous Charismatic ministry whose proponents held down a young man on the floor and poured communion wine on his genitals in order to defeat this man's susceptibility to lustful thoughts by casting out unclean spirits of lust. There are even worse cases which decency forbids me to describe here.

It is difficult to determine how any kind of theology for this came about. When the Charismatic Movement began in the UK, deliverance ministry was one area which did not catch on; indeed up to the early 80s even radical Charismatics still held back from adopting this central Pentecostal teaching.¹⁵ Gradually this changed and especially so after the input of John Wimber since deliverance was a key part of his practice (along with several other occult practices).

Although all admit that exorcism is central to Pentecostal theology, they also admit that there is no sustained, clear exposition of it; one is left to a plethora of sensational paperbacks on the matter, many of which stem from unorthodox sources (such as Roman Catholicism or New Thought). The reason for this is that there is no Biblical theology on this subject with reference to Christians; neither is there any teaching on how an exorcism should be conducted. There is no case of a Christian being delivered from evil spirits and no command from an apostle to seek such deliverance; neither is there any such thing as a 'deliverance ministry'. The problem of sin and temptation is always explained with reference to the cross and sanctification by the Spirit, not to exorcism. Alongside modern man's demand for instant gratification in the world, so modern Christians seek instant deliverance from problems rather than striving for knowledge, grace, confession of sin and repentance.

That Jesus and the apostles cast demons out of people is without doubt, but those afflicted were not Christians. This was also an exceptional period in world history where the ministry of Christ provoked an unusual amount of spiritual animosity. The exceptional grace given to the apostles was to authenticate their heavenly ministry, and differentiate them from the plethora of other sects, and this is not applicable now (Heb 2:4). However, there is a difference between apostolic authority over demons resulting in instant release at

¹⁴ Rm 6 and Col 2 are not talking about water baptism at all but what has happened in being joined to Christ – the old man has been cut off, prefigured in Jewish circumcision.

¹⁵ *The Dict. of Pent. & Char. Mvts.* states that exorcism was central to the expansion of Pentecostalism. (p290, 1989 ed.).

a word, and Charismatic ranting and ravings, which can last hours or even days. No apostle ever punched a man in the chest to rid him of a demon, or wrestled the man to the ground (common in Charismaticism). False Prophet Todd Bentley even boasted about kicking a woman in the face from the platform and knocking a man's tooth out (received with laughs and cheers from the deluded audience). Neither do we see multiple deliverances of the spirit of this, that and the other, with people coming back night after night.¹⁶ In fact, how Charismatics can justify talking to demons to gain information (when Jesus explained that they lie) or needing to find the name of the demon (when Jesus never taught this¹⁷) is shocking. Modern deliverance ministry has very little in common with anything done by Christ and the apostles.

In some extreme cases where a person has given themselves over to gross sin or occultism there may be a necessity to expel a demon from a controlling hold over a person as part of applying the Gospel. Jesus certainly did such. However, such cases are probably rare. Even so, a person who has been troubled by demonic oppression through sin will be freed from this by believing the Gospel and properly repenting. The answer to the dominion of sin and evil is the cross not a ritual. However, just as in some cases counselling may be necessary to fully implement conversion (e.g. there may be a need for repayment of what is stolen, as with Zacchaeus), so a person may need prayer and help to defeat the works of Satan in their life.

But in the case of believers there is never a need for exorcism. The true believer has the Holy Spirit dwelling within who will not make a home with a demon. The believer has a new spirit and a new heart that is cleansed from evil, and can keep himself clean by confession. The believer is brought into the liberty of the sons of God and is no longer dominated by sin. The devil's haunt in man is the old nature, but the believer is able to put off the old man and put on the new. Exorcism is not required for this. If a believer follows Christ and abides in him, as he is commanded to do, there could never be a problem with a demonic infestation. If a believer puts on his spiritual armour (i.e. Christ) he is defended against spiritual attack; but in any case his constant weapon against such attack is the word of God (the sword of the Spirit), not seeking deliverance from some charlatan.

It is utterly shocking that an occult ritual (which is what modern deliverance is) should be adopted by supposed Christians despite its utter lack of Biblicality. But worse, all the Biblical means to deal with sin and enemy attack are ignored in favour of this ritual. Charismatics should consider Christ's sober words,

Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness!' Matt 7:22-23

In conclusion, the Charismatic practice of exorcism of believers denies the fulness of salvation brought by Christ. It implies that the work of Christ and the grace given by the Spirit is insufficient for the work of grace in a believer. The basic premise in the exorcism of believers is a denial of the truth of God's word and the work of Christ. Indeed, it verges on blasphemy. All believers have become a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17); they are united with him and have a new nature created after his likeness (Eph 4:24). They are

¹⁶ The case of Legion was extreme and unusual, as was Mary Magdalene, but even this was dealt with by Jesus simply and powerfully with a word. If Jesus is the model for exorcism ministry, and if he dealt with a legion of demons (several thousand) by a single word of command, then the repeated naming and expulsion of dozens of demons over several sessions is without Biblical precedent.

¹⁷ In the case of Legion that was not the name of the many individual demons but the name he called himself, which was what Jesus asked for. 'Then He asked him, "What is your name?"' (Mk 5:9).

taken from the dominion of sin and Satan and translated into the kingdom of God (Col 1:13). But more than that they are made sons of God. Adoption (a corollary of justification) enables them the privileges of heirs with Christ in God's family (Rm 8:17). As new creations they are the temple of God (1 Cor 3:16, 6:19-20; 2 Cor 6:16). As saved they are taken out of the kingdom of Satan (Eph 5:8). Their life principle is the Holy Spirit who indwells them so that for them to live is Christ (Gal 2:20). To teach that such people need exorcism is to deny all this and seek to make holy the old nature, which scripture tells us continues to be corrupted until we die (Eph 4:22). Thus it is blasphemous to teach that the body which God indwells is the possession of a demon. Neither can Charismatics avoid all this by teaching that demon possession is not a possession but an oppression, or being 'demonised' since the Greek words used (*daimonizomai*, 'to be demonised' or *echein deimonion*, 'to have a demon') absolutely imply possession and control. The claim that believers can be demonised is thus a denial of the salvation God has given his elect. The teaching that believers may need to be delivered of evil spirits is a lie that emanates straight out of the occult. The normal scriptural teaching on dealing with sin, repentance and sanctification cover all that a disciple needs in leading a holy life.

Signs and wonders

The significant historical sign of Charismatics (and Pentecostals) used to be tongue speaking, but the most important feature of modern Charismatics is now the concentration upon healings, miracles, signs and wonders.

Now the first thing to say is that genuine miracles and healings appear to be extremely rare; the vast majority of tested claims are either exaggeration or temporary pain relief due to heightened emotions and passivity. Sometimes it is the beneficial results of the placebo effect. However, even if there are genuine healings this matters little as occult religions far outstrip Charismatics in genuine healings and even miracles – but this is no reason for following their theology. That the enemy has power and can sometimes do powerful things in without question but the expression of power is not a reason for following someone. What is important is the truth.

The focus upon signs is a dangerous thing for these reasons:

- The signs may be caused by demonic activity and not the Spirit of God.
- Signs are common in occult groups (as is tongues).
- Jesus warned that it is an evil and adulterous generation that seeks signs because these are superficial. What is important is to follow Christ (Matt 12:39, 16:4; Lk 11:29).
- Many people who perform real signs end up sentenced to hell and never knew Christ (Matt 7:22-23).
- In the end time the antichristian world leader and his government use signs and wonders to fool the gullible who did not love the truth (2 Thess 2:9-10).

Thus it is an extremely foolish and dangerous practice to seek after signs for themselves.

Charismatics fail to understand the purpose of signs and wonders in the establishment of the church. Jesus performed signs in order to prove that he was the Messiah, sent from God. The Messiah would come to God's people with signs and bring deliverance; when John the Baptist questioned whether Jesus was the Christ, he was told that the proof was in the multitude of healings (Matt 11:2-5; Lk 7:19-22). The healings and signs were thus to glorify God (Jn 9:3, 12:28) and establish Jesus' divine credentials. Even so, healing was not universal or at a whim, but only as God directed for a purpose. Not every blind man was cured at the Pool of Siloam but only the one chosen by God. Not every cripple was healed but only those chosen for a purpose. If healing was foundational to God's purpose, Jesus would have healed everyone in Israel; but he did not. Jesus' ministry does not set a precedent for universal healing of everyone if they have faith; this is the reverse of the

Biblical testimony which shows that healing was not the result of human faith but of God's choice.

Similarly, the apostles were also granted power to perform many signs and healings in order to establish their divine authenticity.

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

Heb 2:3-4

The signs were not universal but were to confirm Gospel preaching; neither were they perpetual. In due course the signs passed away, even during the period of divine revelation. Signs are mentioned much less in Paul's later life, if at all, because the Christian Gospel had by then become established and stood out from all the other religious sects. Signs vanished after the apostles but a few healings continued up to Augustine's day. Tongues also ceased; probably by the time of the destruction of the temple (70 AD), but certainly by the end of the 1st century. Everyone (including Pentecostals) agree that this is true; what they dispute is that they vanished forever, they aver that these re-appeared again in their church 19 centuries later.

So, we can confirm that signs and wonders, healings and miracles, were used by God to confirm the ministry of Jesus and the apostles and to establish the early church amongst a plethora of groups claiming divine origin. The nature of the signs was also very significantly different to those seen today. People were healed at a word and sometimes from a distance. Today preachers need the razzmatazz of a hyped-up meeting to generate passivity and suggestibility before any supposed 'healing' is performed; many of which are later shown to be false – indeed many people have died after being proclaimed healed at a Charismatic meeting.

So the purpose of the signs today is different and the way they are produced is different from apostolic times. Charismatic signs are much closer to occult signs in the way they are achieved and the reason for their use.

What about the other gifts?

The traditional Reformed argument on this matter is that all supernatural gifts have ceased since they were only in use in the time of the apostles for the reasons already mentioned. This is called 'cessationism'. However, the position of this writer is a modified cessationism since it is clear that some have ceased and that others have not, though they may be very rare.

The main argument for cessationism is interpreting 1 Cor 13:10 as teaching that all sign gifts ceased when the perfect came, which is Scripture – the Bible in the form we know it today. However, it is clear in the text that 'perfect' means the restoration of all things when Christ returns and God's work is consummated. After the perfect has come, only faith, love and hope abide – in the new world. Thus the gifts continue until the end of this world. This complies with Paul's command to seek spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:31, 14:1).

However, two gifts have definitely ceased, those of tongues and interpretation of tongues. 1 Cor 13:8, teaches that they will cease, and the Greek word means to cease of itself. The verse teaches that when these cease they will not re-appear. Now all agree that tongues ceased by the end of the 1st century, so according to this verse they ceased forever. This is common sense as the purpose for tongues was for a sign, chiefly to Israel but also to all unbelievers, that the Gospel was now universal to all nations (1 Cor 14:22). It was also a

sign of judgment on Israel, which they would have understood (1 Cor 14:21, cf. Babel, cf. Isa 28:11; Deut 28:49).

In any case the manifestation of tongues in the apostolic period was not like the supposed tongues of Charismatics. Apostolic tongues were actual languages, spoken by people who did not naturally know them (Acts 2:8-10); in fact 'tongue' meant a foreign language. The tongues testified to the fact that the Spirit was opening the Gospel to nations from which it has been previously hidden; the interpretation of the tongue was for the benefit of Christians hearing words of praise to God translated into the local dialect. The tongues were never prophecies or commands but speaking of the wonderful works of God (Acts 2:11).

So, tongues and interpretation of tongues have ceased; therefore those who use modern counterfeit copies of these gifts are not receiving them from God but a demonic source, just as heretical groups occasionally in history spoke in tongues. Tongues and mysticism were always associated with heresy in church history.

However, the other gifts continue for use in the church, but not in the form described by Charismatics.

If we take Paul's list in 1 Cor 12 as basic, then we can say the following:

- The word of wisdom – this is the application of wise teaching which is part of the ministry of an elder. It is practical counselling.
- The word of knowledge – this is the teaching ministry of an elder. Didactic knowledge.
- Faith – this is the act of believing God; different people have different levels of faith. Faith comes through knowledge of the truth.
- Gifts of healings – it is natural for Christians to pray for healing when sick; this is not wrong. In extreme cases the elders of the church should be called for to pray for healing (Jm 5:14-15).
- Working of miracles – in very unusual and extreme circumstances God has manifested this gift in history and may yet in the future.
- Prophecy – this is now the gift of encouraging the church through teaching ministered with God's power to bring hope, conviction and consolation (1 Cor 14:3) as opposed to didactic teaching. It is a forth-telling rather than a foretelling; however, in very rare and extreme cases it may involve the gift of prescience (as evidenced several times by the Covenanter preacher Alexander Peden). The Puritans, called powerful preaching, 'prophesying'.
- Discerning of spirits – this is the wisdom of leaders to see the root source of false teachers (1 Jn 4:1).

Thus church members are urged to share their gifts in the local church for the benefit of all, usually in the form of an exhortation, encouragement or teaching (Rm 14:19; 1 Cor 7:7, 12:7, 14:26; Eph 4:7, 16; 1 Thess 5:11; 1 Pt 4:10).

So, we can see that the chief features of Charismatic churches, the supposed supernatural, are nothing like the Biblical expression of them. These erroneous practices grew up over time as Pentecostal churches expanded and some groups merged occult teachings with them. The more radical Charismatic churches (e.g. the Word Faith variety or the Latter Rain of the 1940s) are those churches where the mysticism and occultism of New Thought, the Mind Sciences, oriental religious ideas and mesmerism were added to Pentecostal ideas. These were then repackaged for importation into Charismatic churches by the Sign and Wonders Movement, or the Third Wave.

Many of the practices and theology of radical Charismatic churches today, such as those who fell for the Toronto Experience error, are those where the seminal ideas of the outlawed Latter Rain theology found a new lease of life. This is how far things have fallen. Even Pentecostal Churches in the 40s (who were riddled with errors) knew that Latter Rain ideas were heretical and condemned them; today Latter Rain teachings are found in the majority of Charismatic churches and all those who submitted to the heresies of the Toronto Airport Vineyard Church and the Assemblies of God church at Brownsville, Pensacola.

Worship in the church

Charismatic teaching on worship is deeply erroneous and ends up featuring mysticism, subjectivism, emotionalism, authoritarianism and fleshly entertainment.

Firstly, the NT has no mention of musical instruments at all and the early church did not have any instrumentation for hundreds of years; when some churches began to use instruments they were condemned by early church fathers for introducing the fleshly emotionalism of pagans.¹⁸ Indeed, widespread use of organs and did not appear until the Middle Ages¹⁹ and up to the late 19th century many Reformed churches had no musical accompaniment. Thus the Baptist Charles Spurgeon, beloved of many Charismatics, never used musical instruments in his London church while Martin Luther said that organs were the ensigns of Baal.

Charismatic worship, on the other hand, is almost totally dominated by instrumental music; not only so but the music of rock bands now predominate. This is the introduction of pagan methods directly into church life. It is pagan shamanism that requires the hypnotic effect of repetitive music and chanting alongside loud drum rhythms in order to induce passivity and suggestibility in an audience; Christ and the apostles never needed such things.

The reason for this is that Charismatic worship is emotional and mystical. It is not rational, spiritual and self-controlled. Charismatics confuse spirituality with emotionalism because they are focused upon subjective feelings. They do not understand that Biblical spirituality is rational (Rm 12:1, 'reasonable' is literally 'logical'), full of truth (Jn 4:24), ordinary²⁰ and decent (1 Cor 14:40), full of thanksgiving (Heb 13:15); it is paganism that features a 'spirituality' that is driven by subjective emotionalism and leads to wild behaviour. It is not spiritual for people to scream, fall over, jump up and down, roar like lions or run around the room; these are traits of paganism and occult behaviour.

Thus the pagan worship of Charismatic worship includes: subjectivism, emotionalism, mysticism, indecent behaviour, fleshly attitudes, repetitive singing, chanting (singing in the spirit), droning music, suggestibility, hypnotic effects leading to overt irrational and uncontrolled actions. Instead of being founded upon objective truth, worshipping God rationally, Charismatics set their sight upon the stimulation of inner feelings which they take to be spiritual, but this is the practice of pagan mystics. The essential difference between Biblical and Charismatic worship is that the former rests upon truth and genuine spirituality while the later is based upon mystical emotionalism, the stimulation of feelings. Thus the attributes of Charismatic worship and praise are based upon pandering to this emotional stimulation – rock bands (at first loud and strident to break in and

¹⁸ Chrysostom, Clement, Basil, Justin Martyr.

¹⁹ Organs were first introduced into the local church by Marianus Sanutus, in 1290.

²⁰ Note, for instance, that spiritual service and spiritual sacrifices lead to very ordinary works of charity, and helping the poor (Phil 4:18; Heb 13:16).

moving to more subdued, moody and droning when the hypnotic effect has been reached); repeating moody trite songs, chanting in unison and then doing irrational things (dancing, falling over etc.). A strong leader faced with such a suggestible congregation in this state can do anything he wants.

There is much more we could examine under this heading, such as the trite emotional songs that have little Biblical or doctrinal content, the domination of congregations by worship leaders (an unbiblical office) or the proliferation of women leaders in worship, but there is insufficient space.

Charismatic worship has much more to do with paganism than Christianity. It draws from occult and mystical sources and leads people into fleshly exhibitions that are very typical of pagan religions. Indeed, some extreme forms are identical to kundalini yoga (i.e. those exhibited in the Toronto Blessing and related works).

Charismatic worship is not Biblical.

The constituents of the local church

Charismatic people have not the slightest clue about the Biblical local church and how it works. In general, Charismatic churches are large, or even very large, and meet in a dedicated building (these days often an industrial shed on the outskirts of town). Their services are largely forms of entertainment where an audience sits subserviently before a platform filled with performers. There is little (if any) congregational participation, no mutual encouragement, and rarely is the Lord's Supper celebrated; indeed some churches never break bread at all. For local fellowship, house groups are established and sometimes a congregational meeting of several house groups as well. None of these structures are Biblical.

The Biblical church is a far cry from all this.

Biblical churches are local (there is a church in a town or suburb, Rm 16:1, but churches in a region, Gal 1:2, 22). They are not centralised organisations gathering hundreds of people from great distances. Biblical churches meet in homes (Rm 16:5; Col 4:15; Phm 1:2). There is no other meeting place for believers seen in the NT; the church always meets in homes and nowhere else.²¹ For this reason the Biblical local church is small in numbers; i.e. the number that can comfortably meet in a house. The Biblical church meets on Sunday to break bread (Acts 20:7). The chief reason for gathering is to celebrate the Lord's Supper, not to worship (that is presumed of all believers all the time), nor to hear a formal sermon. The church gathered ministers to itself through mutual edification; i.e. all the people share the gifts that God has given for the benefit of all in equal participation (Rm 1:12; Eph 4:16; 1 Thess 5:11). In this there will chiefly be teaching (which is paramount), Bible reading, exhortations, encouragements, singing, admonitions, intercession and prayer. In normal circumstances, the prelude to gathering for edification is a communal meal (1 Cor 11:33).

It will be observed that the difference between a Biblical gathering and a Charismatic meeting is as removed as black is from white. It is safe to say that Charismatic church meetings bear absolutely no comparison with Biblical churches; if an apostle were to come down from heaven and visit one he would not recognise it at all. This is a scandal of huge proportions.

²¹ The meetings in Solomon's porch were not worship meetings but simply a place where the early believers initially congregated; the worship of a sect would not have been allowed by the temple police. The meetings in the Hall of Tyrannus held by Paul were public debates in order to promote evangelisation.

Leadership

Along with a false teaching of what church is, there is an equally false representation of church leadership.

It is difficult to summarise the leadership structure of Charismatic churches as they are so varied. However, in general they are all hierarchical and usually pyramidal. There is a chief figurehead of a movement, or denomination, who functions like an archbishop in the Anglican Church. This person is frequently called an apostle, or perhaps a prophet, and he rules in an authoritarian manner; he hears from God and then passes God's word down through the ranks to everyone else who is expected to obey without question. This is shatteringly different from God's word and is blasphemous as it establishes a new mediator between God and men.

Beneath this unbiblical character are large numbers of officers and workers where there is a wide variation. Typically there would be a central leader under the apostle, then a series of elders (sometimes with a differentiation of rank between full-time elders and part-time elders), then congregation leaders, then house groups leaders, the cell group leaders, then the people. Alongside these unbiblical leaders are a range of full-time office and administration workers, such as a chief administrator, a general manager, office staff (e.g. secretaries), audio ministry workers, caretakers, children workers, worship leaders and so forth. Not one of these are Biblical – all are a waste of God's money.

The Biblical church, being small and meeting organically and informally in a home has no need of any of these. The only leader in a Biblical church is an elder, there is no other spiritual office. The elder is a shepherd (i.e. 'pastor') whose job is to care for the flock and ensure their spiritual education and defence against error. He builds up the weak and broken. To ensure no domination of the church by one man, there is always a plurality of equal elders when the work is big enough to need it (note the plural, Acts 20:17; Titus 1:5). There is no such thing as a senior elder. In the NT these men are variously called: pastors, leaders, bishops (i.e. overseers) or elders. These terms are synonymous; the terms Bishop and elder refer to the same person in Acts 20:17 with 28 and Titus 1:5-7. Elder (*presbuteros*) originated from the Jewish concept (Lk 7:3); bishop (*episkopos*) was a Greek term used in the city-states; both carry the idea of guardians.

There is another formal office but it has no spiritual responsibility; this is the office of deacon. The job of a deacon is to care for the practical needs of the saints to alleviate the stress upon elders. Chiefly, the gifts of money to the church are used by deacons to meet the needs of the poor, needy and sick. Only exceptionally, and rarely, is money given to a full-time leader and only then if he is so engaged in public teaching or evangelism that he cannot work, such as an itinerant minister.

All Biblical church leaders are male; there is no leadership that is female, unlike the situation in most Charismatic churches (1 Tim 2:12).

There are other people who minister but who have no jurisdiction over the local church. These are prophets, teachers, evangelists and apostles whose job is to equip the saints (Eph 4:11-12). Now elders (pastors) will all be teachers (1 Tim 3:2) and may also be prophets, apostles and evangelists, but the caring responsibility of the church is given to elders. The job of apostles is to be an ambassador of the local church and go out to plant a new church. An apostle is thus a missionary and has no special authority in the home church. An evangelist helps the church to evangelise and may well be an itinerant minister travelling around preaching the gospel supported by the local church. A prophet is a man who teaches God's word with special grace and power. A teacher brings didactic teaching, but a

prophet brings inspiring teaching. It has little to do with foretelling, rather the prophet is a forth-teller, i.e. he brings God's word regarding what is necessary for the church at that time. He has no authority above the elder.

The rule of elders is within the church alone. While all the church submits to each other (1 Pt 5:5), honour should be given to the elders who care for the church (1 Tim 5:17). However, an elder does not interfere with domestic and personal matters outside the church and never commands people to obey him in personal choices (such as where to live).

All of this is a far cry from the domineering, authoritarian leadership found in Charismatic churches, where vast amounts of money are given to pay for men who do not even do what God commands of elders. Frequently, in Charismatic churches, the needy are not looked after, the poor are not assisted, the flock is not pastured, the people are not taught, and the defenceless are not preserved from attack. Indeed, it is the leadership that brings about abuse of the flock in many forms and opens the door to wolves to come in and ravage the sheep with false teaching. There will be great judgement for such men on the Last Day.

Service

The Biblical teaching on service is very ordinary; it is simply that a man does God's will by loving God with all his heart and soul, then loving his neighbour as himself. This puts all aspects of human living into the sphere of service to God. There is no difference between spiritual service and doing ordinary tasks; a truly spiritual man will serve God and glorify him by the daily tasks he performs in his life as long as he does them in faith and with a heart motivated to serve God. All work done as unto the Lord is performed unto God and carries spiritual weight. Indeed, this work (which God prepared beforehand for us to achieve) will attract rewards from God.

The Reformation was responsible for retrieving this truth from the darkness of the superstition of Roman legalism and super-spirituality. It led directly to the Protestant work ethic, which was to have such a beneficial effect on western Protestant nations for centuries.

Contrary to this, the Charismatic Movement has given birth to a welter of misunderstanding as to what constitutes service to God. At the worst end of the scale is the outright sacramentalism found in some churches where people think that they render God service by building a pile of stones at the front of a meeting to represent their repentance; or throwing bread into a river, or making crucifixes and praying over them. There was even a meeting at Pensacola where major Charismatic leaders wrote their worries on a piece of paper and took them to the platform where a man was dressed in a replica of the Jewish High Priest's garments and burned these papers on a replica of the Jewish altar of incense. This sacramentalism is worse than Roman Catholicism.

However, at the less extreme level, Charismatics, especially young Charismatics, tend to the idea that divine service is only achieved if they become full-time ministers at some level. Many teenagers are desperate to get onto the Charismatic career path in order to serve God better. Those who gain some kind of full-time (or even part-time) leadership feel that they have attained to a better sort of spiritual life than if they had worked in a factory. This kind of thinking is no more than childish fancy.

Whether Charismatic leaders accept this or not, the fact remains that they have promoted this kind of two tier concept of divine service; ordinary living at a lesser degree and real spiritual service only within the ranks of church ministry. Even those who lead children's

ministry or audio ministry are treated as having a greater importance than ordinary members, their portraits appear on the church's website and an implicit authority is given them which has no Biblical basis.

The Charismatic idea of service has done great damage to the flock.

Ecumenism

The Charismatic Movement is an inclusive, ecumenical monster. It contains all sorts of religious heretics and is pleased to have them. An encapsulation of this is seen in the Praise marches of Graham Kendrick; alongside evangelical churches were heretical groups of all sorts and even nuns singing praises to Mary; no one raised an eyelid!

This is not surprising as the earliest forms of modern Charismaticism, seen in the so-called 'revival' at Azusa Street led by William Seymour, manifested a wide variety of people worshipping in a babble of uncontrolled noise. This included witches, spiritualists and mediums practising occult rites within the meeting with no repercussions; many refused to attend the revival meetings, as they were afraid of the witches. When visiting Azusa Street the Pentecostal leader Charles Parham (Seymour's mentor) was so incensed by what he described as '*animalism*' and '*all kinds of spells*' that he said, '*God is sick at His stomach*'.²² R. A. Torrey said that the Pentecostal meetings, which he attended '*seethed with immorality of the grossest character*'.²³ So there has always been a tendency towards inclusiveness without qualms.

As the Charismatic Movement developed, it took a firm hold in Roman Catholic churches early on. The theology and practice, which had been part of historic Pentecostalism, spilled over into American episcopalianism first and then in Roman centres before it had a firm hold in the UK. It was thus inevitable that British Charismaticism would be infected with a universal acceptance of heretical associations. Even the radical Charismatics of the Restoration variety (the Shepherding Mvt. in the US and the Fort Lauderdale Five) had close formal ties with Catholics and said that much could be learned from them.

The basis of these ecumenical relationships is the abandonment of Scripture and truth, as the bedrock of unity, for an association based upon a common experience - being baptised in the Spirit. Truth is not the glue that holds the orthodox together in Charismatic circles, but rather a common mystical experience that is unbiblical.

UK Charismatic leaders, even those once committed to historic Calvinism, soon began holding conferences, and meetings where individuals from the Roman Church would not only be present but were permitted to celebrate mass.²⁴ Formal ties between Roman Catholics and 'evangelical' Charismatics began to occur at many levels, most noteworthy being through the work of David du Plessis and John Wimber.²⁵ Even the Alpha Course has been formally adopted by Catholic officials and used to recruit people to their church.

²² CW Shumway, *A Study of the Gift of Tongues*, Univ. of Southern California, (1914), p178. JR Goff, *Fields White unto Harvest*, (1988), p132. SE Parham, *The Life of Charles Parham*, Garland Pub. (1985), p156.

²³ Christian History Magazine, No. 58, p57-58.

²⁴ Such as at the Brighton 91 Conference at Brighton, East Sussex, hosted by Terry Virgo and New Frontiers.

²⁵ Wimber wrote for Roman Catholic magazines; one article was titled, '*Why I Love Mary*', (*New Covenant Mag.* June 1988). Wimber also accepted the use of Catholic relics (human remains and other objects) to bring healing (Wimber, *Church Planting Seminar*, Tapes 1,2,3,4,5. March 1981). Wimber used many Catholic sources, such as Francis MacNutt or Michael Scanlan; accepted Catholic miracles, like those at Lourdes attributed to Mary; and was re-married in a Catholic church as a believer after a period of separation from his wife.

The Charismatic Movement is unashamedly ecumenical and thus in disobedience to Christ's command to be separate from ungodly and heretical groups (1 Cor 15:33; 2 Cor 6:14, 17; Jm 4:4; Rev 18:4).

Eschatology

There are wide differences in this matter between differing schools. Classic Pentecostals are chiefly Dispensational. This is the Dispensationalism of Scofield's Bible, not the modern more progressive form; thus they believe in a pretribulation secret rapture, a seven-year great tribulation, a premillennial appearing of Christ and the establishment of a Jewish kingdom for a thousand years. A few would opt for the more conservative Historic Premillennialism, but not many. This is an understanding that things get worse and worse until the Second Coming; for many it leads to a bunker mentality and a hope for an unbiblical escape in a secret rapture that scripture knows nothing about.

Most modern Charismatics are not only postmillennial but dominionist. They have a triumphalist view of the end whereby things get better and better leading to a global revival and a golden age until the Lord returns. In this scenario most Restorationist or Signs and Wonders groups believe that the church will dominate the earth and that super apostles and prophets will dominate the church. Some, following outlawed Latter Rain Pentecostal theology, affirm that the church leaders will assume super powers, such as being invulnerable to bullets, able to fly and pass through walls.

Both these scenarios are utterly unbiblical. Scripture very clearly outlines certain facts about the end: things get worse as the Second Coming approaches, including outright persecution of the true church. Despite this the church preaches the Gospel universally in suffering. In the professing church there is a growing apostasy and proliferation of false prophets and teachers who manifest signs and wonders but lead people astray. The false church unites with a global government that becomes fascist, but has a religious as well as a secular arm. This government leads the persecution of believers who are driven underground as the world becomes hedonistic, idolatrous and thoroughly wicked. As things get unbearable, the Lord Jesus returns in glory, takes the elect into heaven for assessment and rewards and burns the earth with fire. The wicked are raised to life to face condemnation and hell along with Satan and his angels. The righteous are taken back to a restored earth, where heaven and earth are united in harmony, to be with the Lord forever. [Matt 24, Lk 21, Mk 13, 2 Thess 2:1-12, 2 Pt 2:4-14; Rev 13, 17, 19:20, 20:7-15.]

The question of historical validity

Historic saints

A very obvious question is, 'If Charismatic teachings are vital to successful Christian discipleship, what about great saints from church history?'

Without doubt the greatest saints in the history of the church were from the past, before the 20th century had progressed very far, (which is when Pentecostalism began). It would be tedious to list these great men and women since all sober Christians accept this as a fact. The best theologians, the greatest preachers, the most intellectual teachers, the most self-sacrificial missionaries, the most loving orphanage founders, the wisest educationalists, and the most pious devotional believers all lived before the Pentecostal Movement began around 1902-4. That these people had a deep, close, intimate and gracious relationship with God is beyond doubt. That these folk were filled with the Spirit is also very clear. That these people were enabled by the power of God to do what they did is also obvious. To give but one example, the way George Muller established his orphanages in Bristol by God's grace, without pleading for money, is justly famous; a far cry from modern Charismatic TV evangelists who do little more than plead for money from gullible, vulnerable people.

For Charismatics to say that these saints were second class citizens because they did not receive the Pentecostal baptism of the Spirit is a disgrace. To suggest that modern Charismatic leaders are more powerful, more spiritual and more full of grace than these people (a claim made more than once) is shameful. Every sober person knows in his heart that the Charismatic claim is folly. The testimony of the men and women of the past stands today and it is clear that they did not need Charismatic teachings at all.

This alone is a nail in the coffin of Charismatic teaching. The Charismatic experience was never needed in history in order to achieve God's will, and it is not needed today.

Evangelical collapse

A second matter is the historical effect of the Charismatic Movement on the UK church over 50 years. It behoves Charismatics to consider this.

Whether one looks intently at statistics or just observes the closure of many local churches and the dwindling of congregations, the situation in general today is dire. We now have the experience of 50 years of the Charismatic Movement in England when Pentecostal teachings burst out from previously isolated Pentecostal churches. This is sufficient time to monitor the effect of this movement; a movement which claimed to be the saviour of evangelicalism, a movement which was based upon power to serve and produce results, a movement which promised to boost the numbers of Christians in Britain.

Instead of the promised growth, we have a serious decline. All the statistics reveal that the numbers of Christians in the country is rapidly deteriorating. At one point in the nineties the dropout rate was 2,000 people per week. Giving to missionary works has also declined sharply, resulting in the cutting back of missions. Evangelism, in general, is much weaker now than in the 60s and is largely left to professional instruments, like the Alpha Course (which is actually propaganda training for radical Charismaticism). While some Charismatic churches have grown numerically, this was done by sheep stealing from other churches, which led to the decline and demise of these churches. There was no real growth by evangelism. But even this wasn't really successful since as many people left by the back door as came in through the front door.

The state of the nation is far worse than when the Charismatic Movement began in England in the early 60s. Over and over again Charismatic leaders have predicted revival and used this ploy to generate excitement amongst their followers, but it never came. Frequently, specific prophecies regarding this were shot down in flames – though no leader ever publicly repented of his false prophecy. As Charismatic claims grew larger and bolder through the decades, the moral state of social conditions grew worse and worse. Despite Charismatic claims to change the world by its inherent power, the nation started to actually legalise unrighteousness as government succumbed to idolatry and eradicated any sense of godliness. This was a far cry from Parliament's calls for days of national prayer during World War II, giving thanks to God after it and establishing Biblical education in schools in gratitude.

In every measurement the nation is in a far worse state today than before the Charismatic Movement took hold. Since the movement itself lays claim to be able to improve the believer, the church and society, it has demonstrated its own failure. The Charismatic Movement has done no good to Britain.

Historical heresies

Throughout history there have been many false teachings which the church has outlawed. One can read up how these began, prospered and were then defeated and cursed in any

history book on the matter; we need not develop this here. By the 20th century it was felt that most of these heretical ideas were things of the past; no one expected the gross errors to return. More than this, the paganism and occultism that had been present in England before the inroads of Christianity was considered to be utterly dead and vanquished. Even rational logic showed the fallacy of such things. But this was before the Charismatic Movement.

Charismaticism has proved to be a Trojan Horse for the corruption of the church. Through it, heresy after heresy has entered the church; but even more than this, pagan practices once considered to be inconceivable, have also entered the church and are commonplace today. We could mention visualisation, necromancy, divination, spiritualism, passivity leading to mysticism, hypnotic effects in emotional meetings, personal predictive prophecy, power passed on by touch from adept to novice and so on. Furthermore, many forms of modern paganism are eastern occult religious practices, which were never part of this country's heritage. For instance the chakra stimulation and kundalini energy release (seen so frequently in the Toronto Experience) stem from Indian mystical traditions which are even outlawed by most Hindu gurus as being too dangerous.²⁶

In the last forty years every aberration of teaching that has been witnessed in church history is now found somewhere in Charismatic churches. Doctrines that were thought could never again gain a hold are being taught in Charismatic churches. From sacramentalism to sacerdotalism; Arianism to Pelagianism; modalism to Gnosticism, all are now seen in Charismatic churches. Indeed, some are approaching Socinianism, for instance, in the recent embrace of Clark Pinnock's Open Theism.

In general, however, even those who would claim to be conservative in doctrine have little or no understanding of the fundamental doctrines of grace. God's sovereignty is everywhere denied, at least in practice. There is the most appalling ignorance of doctrine amongst Charismatics, and thus an inability to live righteously.

The Charismatic Movement has produced believers that are the most seriously compromised people, in doctrinal terms, in history. They have swallowed more error than any other religious group.

The progression of enlightenment

A staple doctrine of many Charismatic groups, based on earlier Pentecostal formulations, is the gradual progression of divine revelation to the church throughout history after the Dark Ages. Though the framework of this varies, a common perception would be:

- The revelation of the truth of justification by faith to Luther and the Reformation leaders (16th century).
- The re-invigoration of Gospel preaching under John Wesley (18th century).
- The rediscovery of the home church and fellowship under the Brethren (19th century).
- A new focus upon holiness during the Holiness Movement (19th century).
- The rediscovery of spiritual gifts (especially tongues) and the baptism in the Spirit by the Pentecostals (20th century).
- Finally, the ability to perform miracles under the Signs and Wonders Movement (The Third Wave).

Each case is the rediscovery of an ancient truth long lost.

²⁶ Kundalini is a form of extreme yoga that is rarely practised as it is so dangerous. It involves the release of inner 'spiritual' energy (chakra) resulting in extreme behaviour, exactly the same as that evidenced in the Toronto Experience.

However, this formulation is sheer nonsense and was used simply to give some sort of credibility to the emerging Pentecostal Movement. That there was a massive injection of truth into the church during the Reformation is without doubt. It is true that justification by faith had been hidden by the Roman Church and needed rediscovery by Martin Luther. The Reformation paved the way for the modern age and it not only revitalised the theology of the church and established Protestantism, but it also made massive changes to the secular world as Calvinism became the foundation of certain nations. The modern world could not have existed without the Reformation.

But the other contentions of this Charismatic list are fallacious. Gospel preaching had been invigorated by the Reformation long before Wesley; in fact it was Calvin and the Huguenots that sent out the first Protestant mission to Brazil. Many Calvinistic preachers had worked extremely hard in Gospel preaching before Wesley was born. Furthermore, Wesley was not the major Gospel preacher in his own era; that accolade should go to George Whitefield, but many other Calvinists were also very active in this period, such as the stalwart William Grimshaw in Yorkshire.

The Brethren were not the first to champion home churches and break from institutionalised formal ministry. There had been a stream of house churches in operation across central Europe since the time of the apostles, mostly operating in secret. Some of these grew into large movements, such as United Brethren and the Waldensians. Other groups are shrouded in mystery as they were persecuted and heresies attributed to them, but many were evangelical at heart, though some were clearly heretical (Albigenses, Paulicans, Cathars). The Anabaptists, a very mixed bunch ranging from evangelical baptists to heretics, emerged during the Reformation and anticipated much Brethren church practice. Even in England house churches were not uncommon at certain points in history; the great Puritan John Owen (1616-1683) pastored two home churches in his lifetime.

The Holiness Movement, while it set many to concentrate upon sanctification, was a very impure stream which itself did not greatly assist holy living. Many American Holiness leaders fell into sin, meetings (especially rural camp meetings) were large and indecent,²⁷ many fell into mysticism and women were placed into denominational leadership (one female leader was called 'The Voodoo Priestess' by the Press). The mystical errors of this movement led directly to the emergence of Pentecostalism.

So the conclusion must be that the list of waves of new revelations taught by Charismatics is arbitrary and without historic foundation.

Conclusion

At this point we must stop as I have continued much longer than intended. By any measure, it is clear that Charismatic theology is extremely compromised and unsafe. It is riddled with errors, misunderstandings, heresies and adoption of alien ideas. Without doubt it is a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Further reading

By the same author:

- *Charismatic Catastrophe.*
- *A Concise Examination of tongue speaking? & Why Tongues Are Not Available Today - A Synopsis.*

²⁷ It was said that during the period of wild Methodist revival camp meetings (conventions) in the western frontier states, 'as many were begotten [by fornication] as were begotten again'. Nothing changes.

- *Worship – Getting it Biblical.*
- *How Charismatic Churches Promote Old Covenant Religion.*
- *The End Time Erosion of Justification by Faith.*
- *Why the local church is small.*
- *Some Forgotten NT Truths about the Church.*
- *The Priority of God’s Word.*
- *Baptism in the Spirit.*
- *The Rescue Package.*
- *A Summary of Occult Inroads into the Charismatic Movement.*
- *What about water baptism?*

Hanko & Engelsma; *The Five Points of Calvinism*, (British Reformed Fellowship).

William Parks; *The Five Points of Calvinism*.

The Westminster Confession and Catechisms.

The Belgic Confession.

The Heidelberg Catechism.

The 1689 Baptist Confession.

Scripture quotations are from The New King James Version
© Thomas Nelson 1982

Paul Fahy Copyright © 2010
Understanding Ministries
<http://www.understanding-ministries.com>