

# The gradual restoration of Biblical doctrines in history

## Is it a valid concept?

There is a proposal made by many Pentecostal / Charismatic churches, and some Dispensational groups, that there has been a progressive re-appearance of certain key doctrines in history that were once lost. The order of this recovery is claimed to be in the reverse order of their disappearance after the early church, with apostolic revival and miracles being lost first. While different groups emphasise differing teachings, a complete proposal of the recovery would be the following:

1. *Justification by faith* via Martin Luther in the Reformation.
2. *Credobaptism by immersion* via the Anabaptists.
3. *Holy living* (perfectionism) via Methodism and then the Holiness Movement / Higher Life Movement.
4. *Healing* via the Holiness Movement and then Pentecostalism.
5. *The baptism in the Spirit* via the Pentecostals. (First Wave)
6. *Restoration of spiritual gifts* via the Charismatic Movement. (Second Wave)
7. *Signs and wonders* via John Wimber. (Third Wave)
8. *Global revival* under modern apostles and prophets.

Then the Lord returns.

A more traditional Pentecostal view of restored doctrines is:

1. Justification by faith. [Reformation]
2. Sanctification (perfectionism) and Spirit-baptism as a subsequent work of grace. [Methodism]
3. Divine healing as part of Christ's atonement. [Holiness Mvt.]
4. The premillennial return of Christ / Dispensationalism. [Brethrenism]

Some in the Wesleyan tradition had a fivefold scheme:

1. Justification by faith.
2. Sanctification as perfectionism.
3. Spirit-baptism as a subsequent work of grace.
4. Divine healing as part of Christ's atonement.
5. Premillennialism.

Thus the claim is that after the apostolic church these doctrines were lost in the reverse order in the early church; only after the dark ages did the restoration begin.

The question is – is there any truth in any of this? The reason for examining this is that the claim is used as a means of establishing credibility for certain groups and teachings claiming to be the last in this line of restoration and thus have special divine authority. Some folk bite at the novelty of it. As always the important thing is to find out what the truth actually is.

## Historical overview

Of course history is much more complicated than these groups suggest and it can be difficult to disentangle events. At what point is a doctrine or practice considered to have appeared? When one person expresses it, ten people, 100 people, or more? If it is one person or a few people, then none of these things ever disappeared in the first place (except global revival – which is yet to appear anywhere and any time in the form claimed by Charismatics). It can be demonstrated that all these doctrines and practices continued in small or larger groups through church history; sometimes merely amongst sects or isolated cults. The doctrines we will examine are:

- Justification by faith.
- Sanctification as perfectionism.
- The premillennial return of Christ.
- Spirit-baptism as a subsequent work of grace.
- Divine healing as part of Christ's atonement.

### Justification by faith

The idea that the doctrine of justification vanished after the apostolic age is just arrant nonsense. The suggestion that Christians did not know about the importance of this doctrine until 1517 is ridiculous. It is true that Roman superstition and sacramentalism obscured justification even before the Dark Ages and that Luther brought the doctrine to prominence again; but it was never lost. Many Christian doctrines were obscured during the absolute reign of Romanism during the Dark Ages because the Bible was not available for the common person. The times were dark because the light of God's word had been almost snuffed out by men. There were no vernacular translations in Europe and few could read Latin apart from monks, academics and priests; in any case the common person was discouraged from reading Scripture because it was detrimental to the outright trusting in the word of the pope and priests.

Despite this there were groups in Europe that continued to teach apostolic doctrines and to meet outside of the formal church. For this they were relentlessly persecuted by the papacy. The exact character of these groups is now hard to establish since their persecutors re-wrote history to label them as heretics; but there were many – the Albigenses, the Paulicans, the Bogomils, the United Brethren, the Waldensians and later the Lollards, the Hussites and others. Some factions of these groups may indeed have been heretical, for instance the Albigenses are frequently described as Manichaeic, though at least some were evangelical. But even before the appearance of these groups, the Church Fathers (i.e. respected theologians) repeatedly taught the true doctrine of justification for hundreds of years.

So, though justification by faith alone was generally obscured under Rome, there were many church sects, individual theologians and reformist leaders who taught it before Luther. Often they were martyred for teaching it. It is certainly not the case that justification by faith vanished completely for several hundred years until the Reformation restored it to prominence.

Here are some quotes regarding the doctrine throughout pre-Reformation history:

God gave his own Son the ransom for us: the holy, for the transgressors; the good, for the evil; the just, for the unjust; the incorruptible, for the corruptible; the immortal, for the mortal. For what, save his righteousness, could cover our

sins? In whom was it possible that we transgressors and ungodly as we were, could be justified, save in the Son of God alone? O sweet interchange! O unsearchable operation! O unexpected benefit! That the transgression of many should be hidden in One Righteous Person, and that the righteousness of One should justify many transgressors. [Anonymous, *Epistle to Diognetus*; from Opera Justini, p386 (late 2<sup>nd</sup> century, preserved with the works of Justin Martyr).]

Augustine [in contending against Pelagianism taught that] works done before faith are not good, but evil, (*splendida peccata*) [i.e. 'splendid sins']; secondly, that works done after faith, although good, as being the fruits of grace in the believer, are so imperfect in themselves, and so defiled by remaining sin, that they need to be sprinkled with the blood of Christ, and can only be accepted through his merits: and these two principles, when combined with his more general doctrine of free, sovereign, efficacious grace, involve the substance of the Protestant doctrine. That salvation comprehended both his Justification and his Sanctification, - the remission of his sins and the renovation of his nature, and it was ascribed by Augustine ... to the free and unmerited grace of God alone. [James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification*, Banner of Truth (1984), p89. (Augustine of Hippo lived from 354-430.)]

This is the true and perfect glorifying in God when a man is not lifted up on account of his own righteousness, but has known himself to be wanting in true righteousness, and to be justified by faith alone in Christ. And Paul glories, in that he despises his own righteousness and seeks the righteousness which is through Christ, even the righteousness which is from God by faith. [Basil (329-379), *Works*, p550.]

The doctrine was always held in substance by true believers; but it seems to have been reserved, for its fuller development, and more precise definition, till the great controversy which arose between the Romish and Reformed churches in the sixteenth century. ... [There is an] adduction of a mass of testimonies, extending from Apostolic times down to Bernard, the last of the Fathers, abundantly sufficient to prove that the doctrine of Justification by grace through faith alone had some faithful witness in every succeeding age of the church. ... So far from its being true, that for fourteen hundred years it was lost to the Church, it was at all times the refuge of awakened sinners, and the relief of humble penitents. Divines have collected testimonies to this effect from the writings of the Fathers, and presented them in regular historical order. [James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification*, Banner of Truth (1984), p87, 92, 93.]

Indeed, GS Faber<sup>1</sup> lists quotations from 16 of the Fathers who wrote before the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, and mentions 12 who were cited by Archbishop Ussher, making 28, and then shows that every century down to the 12<sup>th</sup> reveals one or more witnesses to justification by faith alone.

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<sup>1</sup> Faber, *Primitive Doctrine of Justification*, p96-200, 387-392. See also, Ussher, *Answer to a Jesuit's Challenge*, p472-505; James Bennett, *Theology of the Early Christian Church*, Lecture 3.

The claim that the doctrine of justification vanished from the church and was not taught again until Martin Luther discovered it, triggering the Reformation, is entirely false. Luther championed the doctrine and began a new exposition of it, continued by Reformed theologians and chiefly Calvin, so that it was a rock which broke the stranglehold of Romanism; but he did not re-invent it. The doctrine never left the church but was always held by evangelical believers.

### **Sanctification as perfectionism**

Pentecostals, Charismatics and Holiness / Higher Life teachers want to elevate the importance of John Wesley and Methodism since they are a direct precursor of their movements. Wishing to give Wesley some prominence they single out Methodist teaching on perfectionism, supposedly attributing to him the restoration of the importance of sanctification in the church. They seek to gain credibility for their movements by demonstrating that they are in a line of restored teaching along with him.

Well this is a poor choice since Wesleyan perfectionism is a serious error. We cannot develop a full treatment of this doctrine here; suffice to say that its idea of instant perfection following a mystical crisis experience is utter nonsense. The Bible knows nothing about entire perfection during this earthly life while we have an old nature which continues in sin and grows worse (Eph 4:22-24). Only with the removal of the old nature at the resurrection, when Christ returns, will we know full sanctification. The warning of the apostle John stands, 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us' (1 Jn 1:8).

But perfectionism is an old heresy that did not originate with Wesley and his followers. It had been apparent in various heretical sects from the beginning. The reason why it was not widespread until the time of Methodism was that it has been effectively contended against by evangelical theologians. In Wesley's many local Methodist groups, that seceded from Anglicanism after his death, a large following was established outside formal church protection which generally swallowed the perfectionist lie, along with Arminian ideas on salvation. The Anglican Church was, at least, formally committed to Calvinism and the Calvinistic Methodists in Wales were also Reformed in theology. It was only with Wesleyan Methodism that a large church party grew up in England with a different theology, that of Arminianism (although there were also a small number of Arminian Baptists). Alongside this errant theology other false ideas found fertile ground in which to prosper, one of which was perfectionism.

While John Wesley favoured entire perfection and taught on it to a degree, it was more fully developed by his followers and ultimately became associated with a second blessing mystical experience of divine love, which Wesley's nominated successor (John Fletcher of Madeley) called 'the baptism in the Spirit'. Thus the idea of a second blessing, which for Pentecostals has to do with power and the gift of tongues, was originally conceived as being the ground of perfectionism.

But this is but one expression of perfectionism, which had many precursors in the mystical, Pietist and Quietist movements of previous centuries. The essence of mysticism is the abandonment of rationality and development of the inner (emotional) life, through various disciplines, to allow the unification of the soul with the divine supposedly within. Where the mystic is not a Christian, this is paganism. Where the mystic is a supposed Christian, this is falling into deceit, false teaching and emotionalism. It is a repudiation of the divine command to maintain godly self-control and rationality. It is a blurring of Christianity with shamanistic paganism. Worship is never passive and abandonment of rationality (which merely allows one to fall under satanic temptation) but is always rational and based upon

truth. God requires us to maintain a sound mind and sound doctrine (2 Tim 1:7, 13; Titus 1:9, 2:1).

However, the mystics reacted against what they saw as undue formalism in godliness and indeed they were a reaction to hypocritical supposed Christians who had no depth of spiritual life but were legalistic. One expression of the supposed unity with the divine, which emanated from deeply emotional inner experiences, was the feeling that, being given over to a deep love for God, they ceased to sin any more and led spiritual lives. Many mystical movements led to claims of sinless perfection based upon some emotional experience.

Wesley's teaching was nothing new, indeed John Wesley had been influenced by certain German mystics and translated their hymns. Moreover, his supposed conversion experience was at a Pietistic meeting which he describes in mystical terms (though he never repudiated his earlier religious life, which was clearly legalistic and not evangelical). I have made the case before that there are clear concerns that John Wesley was not a genuine believer; but there is no doubt that he was not evangelical in doctrine. At the end of his life he wrote to his brother saying that he had never loved God at all, that he had never believed and yet felt a compulsion to preach! Indeed, he called himself 'an honest heathen'.

The instant sanctification or entire perfectionism of John Wesley was nothing new but a continuation of mystical teachings that had been around, in various forms, for centuries. The simple difference was that Wesley led a much larger number of followers, which hardened into a new denomination, thus giving him greater historical prominence. Wesley's teaching was not unique, but rather a rehashed mysticism and antinomianism, claiming that an emotional experience leads to a redefined sinless perfection. All it does, in fact, is to diminish any sense of sin and results in either complacency or asceticism.

Apart from the mystics and Wesleyans, perfectionism has been evidenced in numerous other historical movements, such as: Pelagianism, Romanism, certain Arminians and the Oberlin school that featured CG Finney. All these groups downplay what sin is and present confused ideas about God's law, the effect of grace and what perfectionism actually consists of. Differing perfectionist groups present conflicting ideas to other perfectionist groups, yet generally agreeing that man can perfectly fulfil God's moral requirements.

The components of perfectionist teachings can be summarised as follows:

#### *Sin externalised*

Pelagians deny man's total depravity and pollution, so inherent sin is not a problem to them. Other groups accept man's moral pollution but they externalise sin. Rome teaches that inward lust (concupiscence) is not a sin but rather a fuel for sin. Most perfectionism groups claim that sin consists only in the consent of the will to the impulse of inner lust. Jesus, however, taught us that inner lust equals adultery or murder (Matt 5:21-22, 28); it is the heart that conceives the worst sins (Matt 15:18). Paul told us to flee inner lusts (2 Tim 2:22) and even the Law of Moses confirmed this (Lev 19:17). It is the pure in heart that will see God, not the pure of mere external actions (Matt 5:8).

#### *Grace*

Pelagians deny that there is any need for divine grace since man is able to keep the law of God by human will. Most other perfectionism groups confirm that grace (of some sort or other) is necessary. Rome claims that this grace is received through church channels in the many sacraments and through priestly activity, and also through meritorious works such

as prayer, fasting and giving; thus making grace come by works. Evangelical Arminians believe that there is a prevenient common grace available for all men if they choose to obtain it, which enables them to develop further in claiming salvation and repenting.

### *Law*

Pelagians, Romanists and Oberlin teachers claim that the law which Christians can fully keep is the moral law of God. Pelagians claim that man can perfectly obey the moral law by nature; Rome avers that God's grace adjusts the moral law for Christians to fit with our capacities. Oberlin claims that it is justice, not grace, that adjusts the demands of the law. Arminians and Wesleyans deny all this believing that the law to be kept is a new law of faith and obedience.

### *The actual constituents of perfectionism*

By perfection Pelagians mean sinlessness in the same manner of Adam at his creation.

Romanists mean keeping the law which God has adjusted to our ability, and even doing more than this (supererogation); however it accepts that most men fall into venial sins constantly (a small pardonable sin against God or man that wounds love in the heart but does not destroy it as mortal sin does).

Finney (Oberlin) claimed that a Christian may be as righteous as God 'according to his knowledge'. In other words, not according to the actual facts as God sees them. This is serious fudging.

Arminians and Wesleyans mean entire sanctification, which is necessary for every believer before death. This entire sanctification is a misnomer because it does not mean the removal of the old nature, nor does it mean the ceasing of mistakes ('involuntary transgressions'). In other words it is not perfect compliance to the moral law. Yet it does mean the end of an inward disposition to sin in the soul and of outward acts of sin; the person thus becomes governed by perfect love. This is considered as the fulfilling of the law of Christ and is a state of probation since they can fall from grace and be lost in the end. Wesley also affirmed that even the most perfect man still needs atoning blood to cover God's justice and must pray for forgiveness. Clearly this is confused theology!

Modern Holiness movements follow the Wesleyan tradition and they all result in downplaying the sinfulness of sin and a denial of God's standard of righteousness. They stand on a mere subjective view of sin and holiness, rather than God's law. Actually, only Pelagians are true, consistent perfectionists since all the others accept that there is some form of sinfulness and result in diminishing God's standards.

### **The premillennial return of Christ**

Pentecostals, Dispensationalists and others in the 20<sup>th</sup> century wanted to celebrate the renewal of interest in premillennialism by claiming that this was a restoration of an ancient lost truth, chiefly rediscovered by the Brethren. That historic premillennialism is ancient is without doubt, being taught by some early church fathers such as Justin Martyr, Ignatius and Polycarp and originating from Jewish ideas. However, it was never a universal position even in ancient times and was not the prevailing idea about the end times. There is no doubt that amillennialism is the teaching of the apostles since no apostle directly taught anything at all about an end time coming of Christ to usher in an earthly millennial reign of blessedness before the final judgment. Indeed a premillennial Parousia is contrary to the direct teaching of the apostles. Consequently, amillennialism featured in many of the early church fathers, and this was continued by the Reformers and later evangelical leaders.

That premillennialism ceased to be commonly espoused during the Reformation and beyond is also without doubt. Labelled Chiliasm (from the Greek word for 1,000) the doctrine was ridiculed by Calvin and others as being the reserve of a few heretics and needed no critique since it was universally despised by sound teachers.

So, premillennialism is of ancient origin but did become far less common after the rise of Romanism and even the subsequent establishment of Protestantism and beyond. With the rise of millennial musings across the board in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the 20<sup>th</sup> century millennium approached, premillennialism became of more interest to Christians, and particularly Christian sects (such as Mormons, Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses). This century also saw the beginning of Dispensationalism, which is a radical variant of Historic Premillennialism.

However, the claims of premillennialism never did evaporate completely during church history and various heretical church sects continued to aver that a millennial reign of the church on earth before the judgment was necessary. From time to time there was a resurgence of millennial beliefs, sometimes leading to movements prepared to commit anarchy in order to bring about the desired millennium. The most famous case of this was the occupation and siege of Munster during the Reformation. This tragedy began when a number of Anabaptist and other groups managed to gain a political hold in the town and then declared absolute theocratic rule to establish a millennial community under the leadership of prophets. Great abuses occurred, polygamy was established and the town was only rescued after a military attack and occupation by a government army. This event put great fear in the hearts of the political and religious leaders of Europe regarding the dangers of anarchists.

People throughout history who have held a variety of premillennial views include:

- Early church: Gnostics, Montanists, Justin Martyr, Ignatius, Polycarp, Hermas.
- 12<sup>th</sup> century: Joachim of Floris or Fiore (mystic and Cistercian abbot).
- 15<sup>th</sup> century: the Hussite Taborites.
- 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> century: the Anabaptists, Joseph Mede (Biblical scholar), Bohemian and Moravian Brethren, John Napier (theologian & inventor of logarithms).
- 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> century: Isaac Newton (scientist & theologian), JA Bengel (NT scholar & theologian), the Pietists, Campegius Vitringa (Biblical scholar), a very few Puritans, Isaac Watts (theologian & hymn-writer), Pierre Poiret (mystic & philosopher).
- 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> century: the Ronsdorf sect (Zionites), the Shakers, the Irvingites, William Miller (founder of JW's and other Adventist groups, inc. Millerites), Plymouth Brethren, Mormons, Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses.

Thus it can be clearly seen that:

- 1) Premillennial ideas never vanished completely from the church.
- 2) The proponents were generally heretical groups or individual heretics (plus a few otherwise sound academics).
- 3) There was a growing resurgence from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards.
- 4) Some millenarian groups also took up arms to forcibly initiate the coming of a millennial kingdom (e.g. Taborites, Munster etc.) or established isolated elitist communities to prepare for this (e.g. the Ronsdorf sect, the many Pentecostal communes such as Zion City).

### **Spirit-baptism as a subsequent work of grace**

We are all aware of the foundational doctrine of the Pentecostals and Charismatics that a second work of grace (the 'baptism in the Spirit') is required in order to live a successful

and powerful Christian life. This is usually initially evidenced by speaking in tongues (for Pentecostals), or demonstrating other gifts, and definitely implies that Spirit-baptised Christians are better equipped and authorised than ordinary Christians.

This Spirit-baptism is an emotional, mystical, subjective experience, usually preceded by the laying on of hands of an adept, and very often occurring during a time of passivity engendered by an emotionally manipulative worship or prayer meeting where individuals become suggestible en masse. It usually brings feelings of ecstasy or a supposed unification with God and often prompts outbursts of babbling gibberish, which is perceived as Biblical tongues (though tongues in Acts were never gibberish but unlearned human languages).

Historically, where this experience initially came to prominence there were often manifestations of extreme behaviour resulting, such as falling over backwards, dancing, screaming, foaming at the mouth, jumping, making animal noises, laughing or crying. This was certainly the case in Azusa Street and in many countries where the Pentecostal experience was initially exported to (India, England etc.). From time to time, where there is no checking of such behaviour by the leadership, such extreme manifestations appear again, as in the Toronto Experience or at the AOG Brownsville church in Pensacola. It is the fruit of abandoning self-control.

All this is familiar; indeed the term 'baptism in the Spirit' has already been mentioned in connection with a baptism of love, or an experience to initiate sinless perfection for Wesleyans. It was also used in Holiness circles. But what is important is not the term but the experience it denotes. The crucial factor is the following question: does success in the Christian life require a certain mystical, subjective, emotional experience whereby one receives power to behave supernaturally in a very different way to those who do not have this experience?

Now we do not deny that believers have powerful spiritual experiences, and some have exceptional experiences (such as Paul in 2 Cor 12); but such experiences do not change the essential privileges of a believer. Salvation and all its blessings are not based upon subjective experiences but on the gift of Christ to the church. The unification of the elect with Christ gives spiritual authority and blessing to every elect person equally. There are none more justified or more blessed; we are all one in Christ. We each behave differently and some are more obedient than others; we also have differing functions in the church; but in terms of grace, we have all received grace lavished upon us (Eph 1:6-8). The fulness of grace is in Christ and we are complete in him (Col 2:10). If we are complete in him, then we need no special experience to give us more.

Anyone who claims that a mystical experience is required in order to make one a fully-fledged Christian is denying the word of God which states that we are complete in Christ. Anyone who claims to teach a 'full-Gospel' (which includes a second blessing experience) is in fact teaching a distorted and false Gospel.

So the salvation of God is complete in Christ and does not require additional subjective experiences to make a Christian more able to experience grace. We are to be continually filled with the Spirit in order to fulfil our divine calling, but this is not an emotional, mystical experience and neither does it change the foundation of our faith.

Now, having said all that, do we find examples of second blessing experiences in history? The answer is yes, we certainly do, and they are all found in mystical and heretical groups. The idea of a second blessing experience was not restored to Pentecostals late in history, but was continually evidenced throughout history in heretical sects and even occult

religions. It was common in false faiths; indeed it was a vital constituent of both mysticism and occultism.

Now the list of those who teach a second blessing experience in Christian sects and those who demand a special mystical experience to find God in false religions is enormous. We could write whole books examining all these and, consequently, cannot do so here. For a full examination of the subject please see my books 'The Origins of Pentecostalism' and 'Charismatic Catastrophe'.

That the Pentecostal experience, called a baptism in the Spirit which results in extreme phenomena and unethical behaviour, is evidenced in false religions one merely has to look to Hindu kundalini yoga. This has a longer history than Christianity and is, therefore, not a mimicking of a genuine spiritual experience. The results of an adept guru manipulating kundalini in a disciple are exactly the same as those phenomena found in the Toronto Blessing, which are the same as the manifestations in Azusa Street, viz. laughing uncontrollably, screaming, falling over backwards, making animal noises and so forth. In both, the passivity of the disciple leads to behaving in an unrestrained and uncontrolled manner for a considerable time. Often people are psychologically and physically damaged by the experience. Whenever people passively submit to the hypnotic effects of a powerful suggestion (e.g. by a leader) these unrestrained behavioural problems can manifest themselves, and have even been evidenced in the acts of stage magicians. This awful behaviour is commonly the result of hypnotic suggestion, whether in religious, occult or even secular circumstances. It is common.

So, the extreme behavioural phenomena found the Pentecostalism and Charismania are common throughout history in the many mystical and occult false religions. There have even been occasions when a society was overwhelmed with these experiences without any religious precedent, such as in the mass hysteria associated with the medieval St Vitus dance epidemic. There are also occasions when these manifestations occur as the result of certain extreme behaviour, fright or drugs. [See examples in 'Origins of Pentecostalism'.]

As well as being common in false religions and history in general, the extreme behaviour associated with a second blessing teaching has been evidenced in church history amongst heretical sects. Again the list of these is endless, and would include: the Convulsionaires, the New Light Prophets, the Zwickau Prophets, the Camisards, the Methodist Jumpers, the Methodist Camp Meetings, the Shakers, the early Mormons, the Holiness Movement, and the Ranters. To this must be added the many mystics that appeared throughout history, both inside and outside of Roman Catholicism; again the list would be extensive.

So, was the teaching of a second blessing experience of the Pentecostals a rediscovery of a lost ancient truth? No, such teaching, along with its associated manifestations, was common throughout history amongst heretical Christian sects, false religions and occult practices.

### **Divine healing as part of Christ's atonement**

Although the prime focus here is upon healing, we can include in this section the whole gamut of Charismatic claims regarding signs and wonders, miracles, authoritative prophecy and the proposed global rule by apostles and prophets; they all hang together. Where there is automatic healing there is also the expectation of other signs and wonders under prophetic leadership.

Firstly, we must explain that there is no Biblical basis for the idea of automatic healing in the atonement. Just because you are a Christian you have no claim to a sickness-free life.

The few texts used as a foundation for this error (e.g. Ps 103:3, 107:20; Isa 53:5) are wrongly interpreted; Charismatics fail to see that Scripture often speaks about forgiveness of sin in terms of healing (e.g. Ps 41:4; 1 Pt 2:24) and constant physical healing is not in view. But the critical factor is that we are warned by Christ and the apostles to expect suffering in this life, as well as rejection, persecution and problems; indeed we are not to love this life (Acts 14:22; Matt 10:22; Lk 22:28; Jn 12:25, 16:33; Rm 8:17; 1 Thess 3:4; 2 Tim 3:12; 1 Pt 4:12-13). The hope of the believer is in the resurrection not this earthly life now.

The concept behind all Charismatic claims is essentially Old Covenant, external and superficial reasoning. It utterly fails to grasp the spiritual significance of the work of Christ and the basis of the New Covenant. In Charismatic Churches worship is external and Old Covenant; leadership is hierarchical and Old Covenant; meetings are Old Covenant celebrations; giving is the Old Covenant 10% tithe to contribute to an Old Covenant temple-type building and the support of Old Covenant leadership structures. In the same way the expectation of healing and powerful signs is Old Covenant, as per Old Testament prophets.

The prophetic order in terms of uniquely divinely authorised, powerful representatives of God ceased with John the Baptist and was consummated in the prophetic ministry of Christ.

Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. Matt 11:11-13

The Old Covenant way of manifesting the word of God ceased with John the Baptist. God's representation to men was no longer to be by the divine word and signs of a prophet but by the preaching of the kingdom and Gospel of Christ. New Testament prophets are not like Old Testament prophets; they do not stop rain, make axe heads float or call down fire from heaven; they bring powerful exhortations from God's word to encourage, edify and comfort men (1 Cor 14:3).

Supernatural living for the New Covenant believer is not in superficial excitements but spiritual knowledge. The believer leads a life of weakness, suffering, hardship and persecution but in these things his knowledge of God ensures victory, power to live with thanksgiving and patient endurance, joy in Christ and hope of eternal life (Col 1:10-12). Look at the life of the apostles, did they have prosperous, humanly successful, sickness-free lives? No, they were the offscouring of the world, the dregs of humanity (1 Cor 4:13). They were defamed, scourged, persecuted, harassed, suffering sickness, thirst, hunger, fatigue, and severe tribulations such as shipwreck or stoning (2 Cor 11:23-33). There is no Biblical precedent for a prosperous, healthy human life full of miracles in Scripture.

So, having established that the claim of automatic divine healing is not Biblical, do we see this desire for healing, miracles and prophetic power in church history? Yes we do; it is repeatedly found in heretical groups and mystical sects. Where supposed prophetic activity is allowed to flourish, there usually follows a desire for signs and wonders plus the claim that prophets will rule the world and establish a divine utopia. The current claims of the apostolic and prophetic 'new reformation' today are nothing new at all; we have seen this nonsense repeatedly in history.

Again it would take a book to list all those groups that have taught healing, miracles, or prophetic authority and divine power over society, but the following are just a few

examples: the Shakers, the Quakers, the Pietists, the leaders of the Munster tragedy, the Zwickau Prophets, the New Light Prophets, the Irvingites, the early Mormons, the early Jehovah's Witnesses and the Holiness Movement; to say nothing of the spurious Roman Catholic healing centres.

The idea of faith-healing is ancient and early medical practice grew up alongside pre-existing shamanistic faith-healing. It appeared, for instance, in Greece with the Dionysiac mysteries and the temple of Aesculapius. The fathers wrote that the Gnostics could produce miracles. The worship of Roman relics has resulted in many healings in the Middle Ages. Even monarchs between the 11<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries touched people to cure 'the kings evil' (a skin disease). Right up to today there has always been a proliferation of movements and individuals claiming to be able to bring healing through occult means or by the power of positive thought. Sadly, supposed Christian leaders have frequently merged such ideas with Biblical teaching, such as the New Thought Movement of PP Quimby or the associated Christian Science of Mary Baker Eddy. As long as people are sick there will always be those who seek to have authority over sickness, and closely connected is the idea of being like an Old Testament prophet.

Throughout history there has always been true healing brought about through the faithful praying of Christian leaders, from Gregory Thaumaturgus to Martin Luther and the 19<sup>th</sup> century Plumstead Peculiars, but this is not faith-healing, nor automatic healing, nor the signs and wonders of Charismatics; it is the answer of God to the prayers of the saints. It is normal for Christians to pray for each other and God sometimes answers with healing; but often not. However, the claims of automatic divine healing, miracles and authoritative prophetic activity are usually based upon occult sources following many historical precedents.

## Conclusion

The claim of a gradual restoration of lost doctrines to the church is a myth that was developed by people seeking to give credibility to their particular false teaching and denomination.

We have seen here that justification by faith was taught throughout church history and was always present where the true Gospel was preached by faithful churches. It never vanished but it was temporarily obscured by the persecution of the Roman church. It was re-emphasised and given a new lease of life by the Reformation and has continued since, though its true meaning and emphasis is once again under threat by superficial church teaching in many places.

The other items generally claimed to be gradually restored are all based upon false teaching and aberrations of practice. They too have been commonly taught and experienced throughout history. Pentecostalism simply took strands of occult, mystical and heretical teaching & practices and claimed them as Biblical. There was no restoration of lost important truths, just a syncretism of error with truth. The reason why these things were novel in church life is because they were rogue practices and erroneous teaching previously outlawed by the church. Far from these items being a gradual process of restoration of truth, they were the introduction of errors.

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