

# Whither Charismaticism?



by James D. Nickel, B.A., B.Th., M.A.  
[www.biblicalchristianworldview.net](http://www.biblicalchristianworldview.net)

Copyright 1997  
by James D. Nickel  
All rights reserved

### ***Introduction***

No believer in Christ can ignore the charismatic movement. The word “charismatic” comes from the Greek word *charisma*. This word means “gifts” or “undeserved or unearned favor.” The Greeks used it to describe a birthday gift or any other type of gift that came unearned from the heart of the giver. In celebration of the anniversary of his enthronement, the Roman Emperor usually gave a bonus - a free gift - to his soldiers. This gift was called “The Charis.” This word is translated elsewhere in the New Testament as the “grace” of God. Every Christian has been “gifted” by God - his whole life is nothing but a testimony to the unmerited and undeserved grace of God. In the Biblical sense, every Christian is a charismatic. To identify this movement as “charismatic” is to create a false division; it fails to magnify the grace of God in its full-orbed and widely varied manifestations. But, the name has stuck and I will use it in this essay as it is generally understood. This movement, which began in the early 1960s, has spread worldwide and has brought several positive distinctives to the forefront: the enabling power of God’s Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit, aggressive evangelism, dynamic worship, covenant relationships, and political activism.

The movement, however, is a mixed bag. On the negative side, we meet several disheartening realities. First, charismatics tend to elevate themselves over non-charismatics - the “we have the Spirit” versus “you don’t have the Spirit” mentality. Or, if a church does not “move in the gifts,” then it is not “Spirit-filled.” The true evidences of a Spirit-filled church are listed by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:14-6:19 (compare with Colossians 3:1-4:6). Paul says nothing about “moving in the gifts” in these passages. In fact, although the church in Corinth “moved in the gifts,” I labor to emphasize that Paul would not have classified this church as “Spirit-filled” (see I Corinthians 3:1-3). This polarity - “us versus them” - has created unnecessary schisms and rifts in the body of Christ with a resultant attitude of distrust and critical judgment on both sides (sounds like the church in Corinth, doesn’t it?).<sup>1</sup> Second, the stress charismatics put on experiences and manifestations of the Spirit has resulted in aberrant practices and disparagement of sound doctrine.

As we enter the 21st century, we find the movement at a crossroad. Many charismatics are disillusioned and just “going through the motions.” Some of these folk are dropping out of the picture altogether. Many are trying to find “new experiential highs” in the Spirit by chasing after the “next move of God” with an almost mindless frenzy. Some, and they are a minority, are seeking a better way - a return to Biblical faith. They do so self-consciously after, in many cases, years of hard thinking and Biblical analysis.

I write these words as one who encountered God in a fresh way in a charismatic church in Southern California in 1973. I am not writing as an outsider to the move-

---

<sup>1</sup> Some of the typical criticisms charismatics make of non-charismatics are: (1) Bound by tradition, (2) concerned more with ritual than reality, (3) not “open to the Lord,” (4) afraid of spiritual experiences, (5) full of pride in their orthodox positions, (6) too intellectual, (7) dull in worship, and (8) lacking the power of the Spirit. Some of the typical criticisms non-charismatics make of charismatics are: (1) Bound by a love of “experiences” more than a love of objective truth, (2) experiences (baptism in the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, etc.) put one on a higher spiritual plane of living, (3) full of pride in that only they know the “Full Gospel,” (4) abrasively split churches, (5) uncontrolled in worship, and (6) lacking a systematic understanding of Scripture.

ment. I write as a concerned friend of the movement, not as an avowed enemy. I appreciate and thank God for every positive deposit that the charismatic movement has made in my life. I know first hand both the positive and negative sides of the movement and the thorny theological issues involved. I write, and my words may be hard for some to accept, as one whose passion for the Church is that she return to Biblical faith. Once this is done, we will see a reformation in culture that could be described as nothing less than “life from death.”

Hereafter, I will be making some observations about important Biblical issues and their relationship to the *general* trends of charismatic thought and practice today. In some cases, these trends cannot be clearly delineated; it is not a matter of adjudicating an individual or church by an either/or, black or white, analysis. There may be some overlap or mixture. The unfortunate truth of the matter is that many charismatics and charismatic churches align themselves (either consciously or unconsciously) with a theology and a view of life that is contrary to God’s word at certain key points.

At each issue, we need to consider important questions:

- Where do I stand regarding this?
- What am I going to do about this?
- And, to the charismatic movement, “Whither Charismaticism?”

### 1. Authority

Upon what authority do I make decisions in life? Is “walking in the Spirit” defined as following whatever “impressions” that I feel that I am sensing? Is the “bottom line” of the Christian life to be understood as obeying the “promptings of the Spirit” or the “voice of God within”? Charismatics tend to answer the above questions with a resounding “Yes!” Unfortunately, one on hand, many charismatics who are not grounded in Scripture obey these voices and do things contrary to Scripture. On the other hand, many charismatics who know better go ahead and do things they should not do or that cannot be supported by Scripture and excuse themselves by saying, “Well, the Lord told me.” There is no justification for this type of action. This is lawlessness and sin. Too many Christians (not just charismatics) profess that they are “not under the law, but under grace” and then go ahead and disregard the law of God by their lifestyle. To them, lawlessness is a synonym for grace. One purpose of the law is that it drives us to grace (Galatians 3:24). The outworking of the grace of God in one’s life is that it fulfills - meets its requirements and more - the law (Romans 8:3-4; Hebrews 8:10; Titus 2:11-12).

**The Bible ... is the one authoritative rule for life and faith.**

Before we follow feelings, impressions, and voices, we need to emphasize an important point. The Bible is the word of the Living God. It is infallible, inspired, and inerrant. There are no faults within it. It will stand forever and it is by this rule that we shall all be judged on the last day. It is the one authoritative rule for life and faith. God’s word and man’s needs remain constant over time. What God spoke in the Old and New Testaments concerning who He is and what man needs to know does not need to be upgraded by a “new word” today. What He spoke then is just as relevant and applicable today. He does not need to repeat

Himself or reveal something new. We have what He said in the Bible and it claims to be “sufficient” to meet all of our needs. Paul said,

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (II Timothy 3:16-17).

Before we “follow after voices” we had better follow after the injunction of this great apostle,

“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (II Timothy 2:15).

If only we would be diligent to systematically study, know, and practice what the word of God plainly teaches, then we would know what to do in life’s situations. This knowing would be almost instinctive because our hearts and our conscience would be tamed by the habitual submission to the authority and commands of God’s inscribed word. I am afraid that too many charismatics are “looking for a word from God” in the wrong places. “Walking by the Spirit” is living a life that is obedient to His

**“Walking by the Spirit” is living a life that is obedient to His written word.**

written word. We must not approach God’s word on a purely emotional or subjective basis; i.e., existentially. We are to love God with our whole person (Matthew 22:37). God’s word is not ultimately a “devotional” handbook. It is His word and His word is authoritative. It both guides and goads us (see Hebrews 4:12). It is not we who discern God’s word. *It is God’s word that discerns us.* To get close to God, to pant after Him (Psalm 42:1), is to get close to His word and let the Holy Spirit apply its cleansing power to your life. We shy away from His word because of sin in our lives. A definitive test to determine if someone has really been “touched” by God is to see if that person loves God’s word - does he have a renewed desire to read, study, *and* live it? *Whither Charismaticism?*

mately a “devotional” handbook. It is His word and His word is authoritative. It both guides and goads us (see Hebrews 4:12). It is not we who discern God’s word. *It is God’s word that discerns us.* To get close to God, to pant after Him (Psalm 42:1), is to get close to His word and let the Holy Spirit apply its cleansing power to your life. We shy away from His word because of sin in our lives. A definitive test to determine if someone has really been “touched” by God is to see if that person loves God’s word - does he have a renewed desire to read, study, *and* live it? *Whither Charismaticism?*

## 2. Salvation

Is man the determiner of his salvation or is God? If you believe that man’s choice is the determining factor in his salvation, then you are essentially embracing humanism; i.e., man is the determiner of his destiny. This belief has practical implications in church life. If the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is united to the idea of man’s determinative choice, then human activity (and that includes gimmicks and manipulation), excessive amounts of programs (a church activity almost every day of the week), and experience will take priority in church life. Charismatics will prefer to seek manifestations and emotional experiences. Because of a misunderstanding of the Gospel, they do so as a means to establish their spiritual status (validating their acceptance or a form of “works” righteousness) before God and men.

If God’s choice is the determiner of man’s salvation ... if the message of God’s free and unmerited grace (Ephesians 2:8-10) is preached and applied, then God, not man, will be first place in every aspect of life. In church life, the Holy Spirit will

manifest His presence to further God's kingdom and reign; He will be God-centered in all His ways, not man-centered. God will bless His people by His Spirit so that the nations might come to know and glorify Him (Psalm 67).

Two truths must be kept in balance. First, all of Scripture teaches God's total sovereignty (control of every aspect of life) and this includes His election of sinners to salvation and His predestinating them to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (John 15:16; Ephesians 1:3-6; I Peter 1:1-2; Romans 8:28-30). Second, all of Scripture teaches man's responsibility to repent and obey God's commands (Joshua 24:15; Acts 17:30).

**The Holy Spirit ... will be God-centered in all His ways, not man-centered.**

The issue of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility is a highly emotive topic among Christians. They tend to polarize the issue in terms of either/or; i.e., *either* God is sovereign *or* man is responsible. The issue is not resolved in this either/or context. It is resolved in the both/and context. God is sovereign *and* man is responsible. *Both* truths are simultaneously taught in Scripture and sometimes mentioned in the same passage (see Matthew 12:25-30; John 6:37-40; Philippians 2:12-13). They are not in logical contradiction with each other. These truths may be hard to reconcile with our finite minds. If we could grasp in totality the meaning and workings of God's mind and decrees, then our mind would be equal to God's mind. We would be as God and that is impossible. Paul's counsel for us concerning this issue can be found in Romans 9:18-21. In essence, he forbids us to raise questions that come to us at this point. Instead, we should glory in the wonder of His marvelous grace in saving and using sinners like us (see Romans 11:33-36; Isaiah 55:8-9).

I believe that too many charismatics have erred on the side of man's autonomy. There is a tendency to pride themselves in the fact that they, because of their openness to God, are more "spiritual" than their non-charismatic brethren. God sovereignly grants His gifts to His Church (I Corinthians 12:11) *and* He tells us to earnestly desire the gifts (I Corinthians 14:1). There is no contradiction here. Both are true. God's grace gifts are meant to humble us under His sovereign hand so that we serve our brethren in love. They are not meant to cause us to boast, "Hey, I've got this gift and you do not. Too bad for you. You have missed out. You are just not open to the Spirit." Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord (I Corinthians 1:27-31). *Whither Charismaticism?*

### 3. Doctrine/Experience

This is another issue of polarity among Christians. Which is more important? Doctrine or experience? Some answer doctrine and others answer experience. Both are wrong. Both doctrine and experience are important and they must be viewed in proper relationship to each other.

To most charismatics, experience takes precedence over doctrine. It is vital that one "experience the faith." This is so, they posit, because experience deals with the heart and doctrine deals with the head (man's thinking). To them, head knowledge is bad and heart "revelation" (or "revelation knowledge") is good. This separation of head and heart is a false dichotomy. Proverbs 23:7 shows us a unity between the heart and the head, "For as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he."

**Our lives are ... transformed by the renewal of our minds ... not the removal of our minds.**

Our lives are to be transformed by the renewal of our minds (Romans 12:1-2). To many charismatics, we are transformed by experience (the removal of the mind). For example, a charismatic friend of mine informed me, before a certain “revival” service, that “you need to leave your brain behind if you want to get blessed at these meetings.” This comment was given in total sincerity and I am certain that the speaker did not understand its implications. To “leave your brain behind” is to open the door to deception and delusion - indeed, a very dangerous place to position oneself. *Never* are we to “leave our brains behind” *at any juncture* of our Christian lives. On the contrary, we are to gird up the loins of our minds for action as preparation for holy living (I Peter 1:13-15).

Unfortunately, many charismatics disparage doctrine. To many, the word itself seems to be an anathema. “No creed, but Christ” is the cry. “Doctrine divides” is another favorite retort. What is so important about doctrine? Doctrine is important because it deals with authority - God’s word should carry weight in our lives. It is important that we make it a priority to systematically study and obey the directives of His word. When we put His word first, then our experience of God will be put in proper context. Understanding and practicing sound doctrine (the meat of the word) will bring us into maturity and the Church into the “unity of the faith” (compare Hebrews 5:11-14 with Ephesians 4:11-16).

We must also test the doctrinal positions of self-proclaimed prophets, evangelists, teachers, etc. Satan masquerades himself as an “angel of light” and false teaching was a reality in the first century church (II Corinthians 11:14; II Peter 2:1-2). Unfortunately, this is very rarely done. Why? We must know sound doctrine or *we will not be able to recognize the counterfeit*.

Too many charismatics do not have a clue as to what sound doctrine is.<sup>2</sup> The reason for this requires some background analysis. Most charismatic congregations consist of people from a variety of denominational backgrounds (Pentecostal, Roman Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, etc.) or no denominational background. In these churches, you will find one or more of these praiseworthy elements:

- A sincere love for the Lord (though, if asked to define who the “Lord” is or what “loving the Lord” requires, you would get many different answers or possibly a blank stare or two).
- A bubbly enthusiasm for the Christian life.
- A conservative stance on the pressing social issues of the day.
- A genuine desire to become familiar with Scripture.

On the negative side, most charismatic churches will have many, if not all, of the following serious problems:

- No solid and systematic Biblical foundation (non-creedal, non-confessional).
- An overly subjective approach to theology and worship.

<sup>2</sup>A statement made centuries ago by the French thinker, mathematician, and scientist Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) accurately reflects the state of the most charismatics, “Truth is so obscure in these times and falsehood so established that unless we love the truth, we cannot know it.”

- A neglect of the sacraments, particularly the Lord's supper.
- Dispensationalism (see the discussion under eschatology below).
- A mixture of views concerning virtually every aspect of Christianity.
- Church government dysfunctional - elders and deacons not positioned or functioning according to Scripture.
- A phenomenal debt problem.

In this cacophony of beliefs and practices, most charismatic pastors try to find some point of commonality. That point will most likely be based upon subjective distinctives (moving in the "gifts of the Spirit" or "experiencing God" or "love"), not objective distinctives (sound doctrine and unity of the faith). It is much easier to focus on experiential Christianity than on doctrinal Christianity. From a pastoral standpoint, to preach sermons that are exegetical and systematic with a goal of leading the congregation into a mature understanding of the faith is a lot harder than the "three points and plenty of stories" approach. When sound doctrine is neglected, subjectivism replaces it. Because of this, I truly believe that many charismatics just want to get their "ears tickled" and their "feelings stimulated" - to get a "high." If they have "felt something," that means that they have "felt" God. Yes, they may feel the "spirit." But, that does not guarantee that what they "felt" has been generated the Holy Spirit. The congregation will follow their leadership in these matters. The onus is on pastors and leaders to repent and refocus their priorities (see Ezekiel 34 and Jeremiah 23).

Because of this subjective bias, many charismatics allow themselves to be duped by teachers who are totally unorthodox and whose doctrinal positions reveal heretical ideas. If there is a test it goes like this, "Are you baptized in the Spirit?" "Do you speak in tongues?" If the answer to both questions is yes, then everything is okay.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, as a parenthetical note, if someone says he does not speak in tongues, then what he says, writes, or teaches carries no significance with most charismatics because, in their understanding, "he does not have the Spirit." The validation rests upon this false equivalence: "How could anyone who speaks in tongues or who is 'baptized in the Spirit' teach false doctrine? This cannot happen because he has the Spirit!"

From another perspective, many charismatics look at immediate fruits as God's stamp of approval upon a ministry: "Look at how God is blessing his ministry!" "Look at the number of people who have been touched by God!" "Look at how many people go to his church!" Well, many people testify to the wondrous change in their lives caused by practicing transcendental meditation. Does that make transcendental meditation true? This type of reasoning is an example of the logical fallacy of "asserting the consequent." If a ministry abides in God's word, then it will bear fruit. This is a major premise and we can posit its truthfulness from Scripture (see John 15:5, 16). Let P = a ministry abides in God's word (the antecedent) and let Q = it will bear fruit (the consequent). Therefore,  $P \Rightarrow Q$  is a true statement. If Church X abides in God's word (P),

---

<sup>3</sup> Charismatics are notorious for building "high profile" ministries (TV, radio, mega-churches, etc.) without the solid foundation of sound doctrine and seasoned maturity. In the past decade, we have witnessed many of these edifices come "crumbling down" by the merciful hand of God. Unfortunately, many charismatics have not yet got the point that God is trying to make. Woe unto us when God's merciful hand turns to judgment.

then we can conclude that Church X will bear fruit (Q). To assert the antecedent is to assert the consequent. We *cannot conclude* that since Church Y (the consequent) is bearing fruit, then Church Y is abiding in God's Word (the antecedent). This statement *may* be true, but we *cannot logically* assert its truthfulness in an absolute or universal sense. This is the fallacy of "asserting the consequent."

To engage in Biblical discernment, it is necessary that we study Scripture<sup>4</sup>, church history, and the historic confessions and creeds.<sup>5</sup> By studying Church history one will discover the truth of the proverbial saying, "There is nothing new under the sun." Every heresy or deviation from truth that we see today has come around before under another guise. Sound doctrine is developed by a consistent, contextual study of Scripture. There are four errors that Christians commonly make in their approach to Scripture:

- They do not read enough.
- They do not take the time to understand the historical context - they read it like it was "dropped out of the sky and into our modern era."<sup>6</sup>
- They read into Scripture what they think it says.
- They do not compare Scripture with Scripture - they do not let it interpret itself.

As we study Scripture with must recognize that two thousand years of Church History have already taken place - there is much wisdom to be gained by reading the Creeds, the Confessions of Faith, and the Catechisms. Not only do they give us wisdom, they will protect us from heresy. To reject the wisdom learned from a study of Church history and say, "I can understand it all by myself," is an arrogant display of foolishness.

**We must "learn the faith" in order to "live the faith."**

Because ideas have consequences, false doctrine is unhealthy and will eventually produce bad fruits. Time will validate this. The fruit that is borne of the truth that is in Christ is fruit that will *remain* (John 15:16). It is *a reflection of our love for Christ and His word* when we require leaders of the church to adhere to sound doctrine.

We must "learn the faith" in order to "live the faith." Our doctrine will then validate our experiences, not vice versa. We will be transformed by obedient renewal of our minds, not by seeking some new experience. Our experiences will flow out of our understanding of the faith. Instead of being anti-creedal and approaching Scripture in

<sup>4</sup> "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20).

<sup>5</sup> A good place to start is to read Rousas J. Rushdoony's *Foundations in Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (Thoburn Press, 1978).

<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that the Bible was not written *to* us; it was written *for* us. For example, Paul's letter to the Church at Colossae was a letter written to *that* first-century church. We, two thousand years later, must endeavor to first read that letter "over the shoulders" of the congregation in Colossae. This will require some "homework" on our part - to understand the historical context, etc. It is only as we understand each book of the Bible in its historical context that we will discern its message *for* us. As a parenthetical note, the many and somewhat fanciful interpretations of the book of Revelation result from the failure to understand that this book was written to seven churches in Asia Minor. We will never understand and apply the message of Revelation rightly until we first grasp what it meant to those who first read it.

an eclectic fashion (seeking proof texts as “the Spirit” leads), we will commit ourselves to a systematic study of Scripture and to the compact wisdom unveiled by the historic creeds and confessions of the Christian Church. *Whither Charismaticism?*

#### 4. Power

Charismatics are fond of distinguishing themselves as believers in the miracle power of God. At the onset it should be noted that the presence of miracles does not necessarily reveal genuine Christianity (Matthew 7:22-23; 16:4). That God omnipotently performs miracles today according to His sovereign will is not denied. The issue before us is whether our *focus* should be on the power of God manifested in miracles and other manifestations of the Spirit (I Corinthians 12:9-10). Should we be seeking power in miracles or in someplace else? Have charismatics missed the point by primarily concentrating power on miracles and other “highly visible” spiritual gifts?

**It is the Gospel that is the power of God unto salvation.**

Miracles will not persuade anyone of the truth of Christianity - “If they do hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rise from the dead” (Luke 16:31). Why? A man dead in sin is not open to truth, hates God, and loves sin. It is the preaching of the Gospel that exposes his rebellion and his lost condition. When the Gospel word goes forth, the Holy Spirit blows like the wind and awakens the dead bringing new life and the desire to embrace Christ. *It is the Gospel that is the power of God unto salvation* (I Corinthians 1:18; Romans 1:16; I Thessalonians 1:5).

Unfortunately, many in the charismatic movement promote manifestations and miracles over a clear presentation of the Gospel. I attended one “revival” service where a prominent charismatic evangelist said that only the “presence of God,” not preaching, will change lives. He then stood behind the pulpit for twenty minutes and said nothing. I assumed that he was waiting for the “presence” to change lives. Lives cannot be changed unless one hears the Gospel proclaimed in a rational, coherent manner (Acts 2:37-38; Romans 10:13-15; Ephesians 1:13; Colossians 1:5-6; I Thessalonians 2:13).<sup>7</sup>

We have lost the vital reality of the transformational power that the preached word has on those who hear. This is God’s chosen way to bring men and women into His kingdom. It is extremely dangerous to focus the power of God on miracles over against the content of the Gospel. When the word of God is preached with the unction of the Spirit of God, men and women dead in sin will be raised to life - that is *power*.

The search for power principally in miracles and manifestations opens the door to deception and delusion. It reflects a poor state of sanctification when we continually crave for new spiritual novelties and greater emotional highs. The life of faith lived in

<sup>7</sup> On another occasion, I saw this same evangelist make an altar call and about 200 people came forward. He then said, “Look at all these people! And there are some people who criticize me and my ministry for not preaching repentance!” What was ironic about the situation was that this evangelist had not yet, to this point, proclaimed anything that could remotely resemble the *content* of the Gospel. His appeal was based upon nothing less than *raw* emotion generated by a little “pep” talk and a few lively “worship choruses.” Are people to repent by *osmosis*? Does the Holy Spirit convict people in a *vacuum*?

quiet obedience to God and His inscriptured word is the life of power. *Whither Charismaticism?*

## 5. Worship

One can hardly fault the positive thrust that charismatics have brought to corporate worship. The freedom and liberty expressed in charismatic churches should indict the dry, cold, and dead formality of most churches.

Unfortunately many charismatic churches have lost the focus of worship and have, in contradistinction to their criticism of dead, formal tradition, introduced their own “holy, charismatic” traditions. By this I mean that a worship service is not a “real” worship service unless you have “singing in the spirit,” raising of hands, a “prophetic” word, and the consequent test of approval expressed in the phrase, “I felt the presence of God this morning.” In this emotionally driven liturgy, charismatics have dangerously come close to worshipping worship or “good feelings,” instead of the living God.

In the Bible, every aspect of life for the believer is to reflect worship of the one, true, triune God as revealed by His Son, Jesus Christ, and made manifest by the Holy Spirit (Zechariah 14:20-21; John 4:24; Colossians 3:17). When the first-century saints came together on the Lord’s Day<sup>8</sup>, they *did* what God had commanded them to do, not what they *felt* like doing.<sup>9</sup> They prayed, sang, testified, gave of their earnings, listened to the preached word, and broke bread (celebrated the Lord’s Supper or Eucharist). Every aspect of that day, like every other day, was one of giving thanks (the meaning of “Eucharist”) to God for who He is, what He had done, is doing, and will do according to His eternal decrees. In the Bible, worship, as illustrated by participating in the regular (most likely, weekly<sup>10</sup>) communion cele-

**In the Bible, every aspect of life for the believer is to reflect worship of the one, true, triune God.**

<sup>8</sup> They followed the pattern and order established by Ezra (see Nehemiah 8:1-12).

<sup>9</sup> Too many charismatic churches discard a structured order of corporate worship (dare I use the term “liturgy”?) because they fear it will generate a “vain and repetitious” superficiality. They say, “It is the heart that matters, not the form.” I agree. But, every church has a “liturgical” order of worship. Liturgy is inescapable. As I have said, charismatic churches have their own “holy traditions” and there are more people in these congregations than you would think who just go through this “form” while their heart is far from God. The point is this: We are to follow the pattern of worship laid out by Scripture. It is the responsibility of those in leadership to use this pattern and *lead* the congregation in worship that truly comes from the heart (see John 4:24).

<sup>10</sup> I think that many churches interpret Paul’s words, “For as often as you eat the bread and drink the cup ...” (I Corinthians 11:26) to mean: “We’ll do this whenever we get around to it.” They also fail to understand that, through this meal, we receive the blessing of His gracious presence *if* we judge ourselves rightly (compare I Corinthians 10:16 with I Corinthians 11:27-32). If not, we eat and drink judgment on ourselves. It is not *just* a “memorial” meal. The words “memorial” and “remembrance” come from the Greek word, *anamnesis*. This word means more than a simple “recalling of the facts.” It points to an active participation in the effects of the finished work of Christ; what He accomplished for us in His death, burial and resurrection becomes operative in us through this meal. This is why the early Christians attached so much importance to this meal. They would risk any inconvenience (even death) to be present with their fellow believers to partake of the new covenant celebration. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, question 96, says, “The Lord’s supper is a sacrament (Note: those of the Baptist

bration, is defined as a sacramental lifestyle of service to God and His kingdom for His glory (Romans 12:1-2). When the saints assembled, truth was proclaimed. God's truth will touch the whole man so an emotional or bodily response cannot and should not be considered outside the limits of Biblical parameters.<sup>11</sup> Some of the ways one can respond to truth are:

- tears of repentance.
- joyous exuberance of thanksgiving for His unmerited grace and mercy.
- silent thought or contemplation.
- a quiet determination to obey or change one's lifestyle.
- bowing the knee.
- raising or clapping the hands.
- a spoken word of encouragement, edification, or comfort.
- intercessory and, on occasions, imprecatory prayers.
- speaking or singing God's attributes back to Him in wonder and adoration.

Many charismatics pride themselves in their spontaneous worship and lack of structure and order. Sometimes their worship services look like a "free for all" where everybody is doing their "own thing." After attending some charismatic services, I've gotten the impression that "loudness is next to godliness." Paul instructs us that our worship services are to be structured, orderly, and decent (I Corinthians 14:26-33).<sup>12</sup> If one has a word, he can wait until opportunity is given and the whole body can hear and be edified thereby. Common courtesy is required. Freedom and liberty can be expressed with Biblical form. Freedom without form or structure produces license and chaos. *Whither Charismaticism?*

## 6. Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The charismatic emphasis on the gifts (charisma) of the Spirit, especially certain ones - tongues and prophecy, has created a storm of controversy in the Christian church. It has caused many to study what Paul said in I Corinthians 12-14 with added impetus and interest. My purpose, at this point, is not to delve into these issues of controversy.<sup>13</sup> Charismatics, in their exuberance about the gifts, have tended to place certain spectacular gifts on a pedestal as the "stamp" of spirituality and evidence of the presence of the Spirit. Does that mean that one bequeathed with one of the less glamor-

---

persuasion would prefer the word 'ordinance' - see *A Baptist Catechism*, compiled by Charles Spurgeon, question 80), wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to Christ's appointment, his death is showed forth; and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace."

<sup>11</sup> See the many kinds of responses to God described in the Psalms. To be Biblical in worship does not only mean that we are careful not to go beyond Scripture; it also means that we do what Scripture says.

<sup>12</sup> Do not equate order and decency with dry and lifeless. Corporate worship should be Biblical and Christ-centered. I am amazed at the many churches who pride themselves as being Biblical in their worship (e.g. exclusive Psalmody) but do not *do* what the Psalms speak of (i.e., raising hands, clapping hands, etc.). To sing about it is Biblical, but to actually *do* it, well, is unheard of!

<sup>13</sup> I can recommend D.A. Carson's *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of I Corinthians 12-14* (Baker Book House, 1987) as an even-handed, scholarly, and pastoral attempt to expound and explain these chapters.

ous gifts like “helps and governments” (I Corinthians 12:28) is not quite as spiritual and shows the presence of Spirit in a somewhat dimmer fashion?

The gift of prophecy brings with it several cans of worms. I attended one charismatic church where the pastor talked for an hour about what is important in the Christian life. The first thing of importance was studying and obeying the Bible. He spent about two minutes on that. Then, for the rest of the time, he talked about how important it was to write down and meditate on prophetic utterances (i.e., your “personal prophecies”) spoken to you by others. No mention was made of testing or weighing these so-called prophecies (I Thessalonians 5:20-21). Another charismatic pastor told his congregation that he spent the weekend seeking God’s direction for his church by meditating on all the “words of prophecy” given in his church over the past several years. These two pastors, by their pronouncements from the pulpit, *implied* that these “prophetic words” held the same authority as the Bible. By their *emphasis*, one could even conclude that these “words” were more important than the clear teachings of Scripture.<sup>14</sup> These are examples of the perilous practice of divorcing the “prophetic” word from the objective word. To many charismatics, the gift of prophecy brings extra-Biblical revelation - new words from God - a dangerous proposition.

In the New Testament, the gift of prophecy is subject to and judged by the authoritative word of God. This gift is given by God for serving the body: to edify, comfort, and exhort each member. The goal of this gift is to apply the authority of Scripture to the need of the moment (I Corinthians 14:3). I hasten to add that there is no need to preface your remarks with the quaint and overused phrase, “Thus saith the Lord.” Just speak as you normally would, but with the conviction, wisdom, and knowledge granted for the moment by the Holy Spirit. Always end your remarks with, “Judge what I’ve told you by the Bible.” I believe this gift occurs in charismatic churches less often than most think and it occurs in non-charismatic churches more often than most think. *Whither Charismaticism?*

## 7. Eschatology

According to Pentecostal historians, at the dawn of the twentieth century (1901) a Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit took place in Topeka, Kansas. This outpouring soon came to Los Angeles and found a home in a small church on a street named Azusa. The fires of the Spirit spread from there to around the world.

Soon after (1909), a new Bible came off the presses and found its way into the hands of many of these Pentecostals. This Bible had in it a series of reference notes compiled by the Rev. Dr. C. I. Scofield (1843-1921) that detailed a fascinating and somewhat new theory of eschatology (doctrine of last things) called dispensationalism.<sup>15</sup> These notes were not original with Dr. Scofield. He got them from the English

---

<sup>14</sup> I desire to give them the benefit of the doubt. I used the words “implied” and “emphasis” carefully. If confronted, I would hope that they would acknowledge the priority of Scripture over words of “personal prophecy.” My concern is that, if they believed in this truth, they did not carefully inform their congregation of this truth.

<sup>15</sup> Dispensationalism posits:

- A strict distinction between Israel and the Church.
- God has utilized various plans for dealing with man; when one fails, He introduces a new one (i.e., dispensation).

minister John Nelson Darby (1800-1882). Darby also wrote a reference Bible that served as a prototype for Dr. Schofield's Bible. Darby got his ideas from a Scottish Presbyterian minister named Edward Irving (1792-1834). Irving, in 1826, had translated into English a book, *The Coming Messiah in Glory and Majesty*, written by Manuel Lacunza (1731-1801), a Spanish Jesuit from South America. Irving did this translation because he had read several tracts based upon Lacunza's book written by Samuel R. Maitland (1792-1866), librarian to the Archbishop of Canterbury. Lacunza based his book on the writings of Francisco Ribera (1537-1591), Spanish Jesuit. Ribera wrote a 500 page commentary on the Book of Revelation where he stated that after chapter three, all the book is future. He did this to refute the belief of the Protestant reformers that pronounced the Pope and the Papal system to be the Antichrist.

Unfortunately, the Pentecostal movement of the early twentieth century looked to the Schofield Reference Bible as the source of its eschatological doctrine and the charismatic movement in the early 1970s looked to the books written by Hal Lindsey - his writings popularized the Schofield notes - as the basis for its eschatology.

Many books have been written that refute this view.<sup>16</sup> These dispensational ideas have serious consequences. Hal Lindsey, in his book *The Late, Great Planet Earth*, said, "We should live like people who don't expect to be around much longer." This is nothing but an invitation to the "salt of the earth" to "lose its savor" (Matthew 5:13). This sort of thinking has led to (1) a withdrawal of cultural concern, (2) pessimism about the future and (3) the irrelevance of the church in society.

According to this view the Bible speaks *only* to man, the family, and the church. But, the Bible also speaks to culture and governmental leaders (see Psalm 2 as an example).<sup>17</sup> The dispensational view of eschatology holds very little hope for the progress of the Gospel in time and on earth. The Bible says that:

- Christ will reign until all His enemies are placed under the footstool of His feet (I Corinthians 15:25; compare with Psalm 110),
- Christ will build His church and the gates of Hades will not overpower it (Matthew 16:18),
- Christ expects all nations to become His disciples (Matthew 28:18-20; compare with Psalm 72), and
- The name of Christ will be great among the nations from the rising of the sun, even to its setting (Malachi 1:11).

- 
- The church will be secretly raptured prior to the Great Tribulation, which would afflict the world as a precursor to Christ's return in judgment and the establishment of the millennium on earth.

<sup>16</sup> See Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977), J. Marcellus Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness* (Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1991), Iain Murray, *The Puritan Hope: Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (Banner of Truth, 1971), or Kenneth Gentry and Greg Bahnsen, *House Divided: The Break-up of Dispensational Theology* (Institute for Christian Economics, 1989).

<sup>17</sup> There are dispensationalists who do get involved in cultural/political issues. They do so, however, as theological schizophrenics (they act inconsistent with the logical consequences of their eschatological tenets). With one voice they proclaim, "The sky is falling! The sky is falling!" And, from the same mouth, they try to influence culture toward righteousness. They have a "Titanic is sinking" mentality while trying to repair the ship as it is sinking.

Christians who embrace dispensationalism become short term thinkers.<sup>18</sup> They cannot see beyond their lifetime or beyond the next few years (“Why, the rapture is imminent, isn’t it?”). To generate church growth and numbers, all types of gimmicks are culturally adaptable programs are instituted. Immense church buildings are constructed with little attention given to the debt incurred (“Well, 30 years from now we’ll be in the millennium anyway!”).<sup>19</sup>

A Biblical Christian will be optimistic about the future.<sup>20</sup> His thinking will be long-term and generational (Proverbs 13:22). For example, a parent will teach their children how to teach their children to follow Christ and will prepare an inheritance for their children’s children. A pastor will structure his ministry in terms affecting his community for Christ now and in the future (three to four generations from now).

**A Biblical Christian will be optimistic about the future. His thinking will be long-term and generational.**

A Biblical Christian knows that God will add to His Church by the means of the faithful and uncompromising proclamation of the Gospel. The Biblical Christian plans and works for the day when “the knowledge of the glory of the Lord will fill the earth as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9; Habakkuk 2:14; Psalm 72:19) even though he realizes that he may never see the fulfillment of these sure words of God in his lifetime. *Whither Charismaticism?*

## Conclusion

Charismaticism uncorrected by the word of God results in aberrant Christianity as evidenced by:

- The Word of Faith movement.<sup>21</sup>
- The restoration movement - a belief that God, in these end times (a bias based upon a precommitment to dispensational eschatology), is restoring the gifts of

<sup>18</sup> This short-term mentality governs their political activity. They look for quick fixes (elect a conservative President or Congress, try to get a “seat at the table” of a political party, etc.). No one asks the important question: “What should we be doing now that will bear righteous fruit for our country for the long-term (200-300 years from now)?”

<sup>19</sup> There is nothing inherently wrong with large church buildings as long as they have been substantially financed beforehand by the tithes and offerings of God’s people. God requires tithing and an avoidance of long-term debt. Deficit financing should be avoided by God’s people for it reflects the condition of slavery (Proverbs 22:7). We have been called to liberty, not slavery. The giving of God’s people should establish the limits of God’s work (in human terms). The standard is God’s word, not our perceived needs. The way of blessing is the way of obedience and we can expect that God will bless a congregation that is faithful to His word at this point.

<sup>20</sup> This long-term optimism concerning the worldwide impact of the Gospel in time and on earth will not blind the Biblical Christian to the possibility of trials and tribulations coming short-term. In the past 100-150 years, the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ has lost much ground and influence (i.e., the salt has lost its savor) because she has compromised and diluted the Gospel. There are no “quick fixes” available for recovering this lost ground. Only the purifying fire of God’s judgment over time will remove the dross contained in the Church (see Malachi 3:3-4; I Peter 4:17; Isaiah 26:9).

<sup>21</sup> For a sound, Biblical analysis of this movement, see Curtis Crenshaw, *Man as God: The Word of Faith Movement* (Footstool Publications, 1994) and D. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel* (Hendrickson Publishers, 1995).

the Spirit to the Church and that these gifts have lain dormant for centuries leaving the Church impotent.<sup>22</sup>

- The revivalism movement - A belief that various “waves of the Spirit” come around periodically. You had better catch these “waves” when they come or else you will “miss the boat!”<sup>23</sup>

Despite “lip service” to the word of God, charismaticism promotes:

- Subjectivism - the search for new experiences and judging truth by how one feels about it,
- Existentialism - finding meaning in the mindless experience of the moment, and
- Narcissism - an unhealthy and unbalanced focus on personal desires and needs.

The unity of man - heart and mind - is denied by the absolutization of emotionalism. The continual search for new spiritual novelties and fads (the current craze is the so-called “Holy Laughter revival” or the “Toronto Blessing”) will end up with disillusionment and defeat because of its self-orientation.

Before I am censured by charismatics for this appraisal, let me affirm that God can sovereignly bless individuals who are caught up in these movements in spite of the errors these movements propagate. Most charismatics who are caught up in these movements sincerely believe that they are following God in His fullness. But, unless these people ground themselves in God’s word and become sound in their understanding of the Christian faith, they will either fall by the wayside or be useless to God and to the *long-term* furtherance of His kingdom (see Matthew 13:19-23). The onus is on the leaders of these movements to humble themselves, repent, and return to sound doctrine. If not, God will send a delusion upon them and their followers - and I believe He is sending it *now* (see the principle illustrated in II Thessalonians 2:10-11 and the plain warning of II Timothy 4:3-4). Read also the word given by God to the prophet Amos about “sending a famine in the land ... a famine of *hearing* the words of the Lord” (Amos 8).<sup>24</sup>

The answer to the errors of charismaticism is a return to Biblical faith. Charismatics must endeavor to embrace balanced, historic Christianity; to become reformed in truth and to understand that God has given gifts to the Church to renew her for the task

---

<sup>22</sup> See Crenshaw’s *Man as God*. Those who say such things are just revealing their ignorance of Church History. As one example, no one in their right mind can claim that a man like Charles Spurgeon (a nineteenth century Baptist pastor who did not speak in tongues) preached *without* the anointed power of the Spirit!

<sup>23</sup> See Cal Beisner’s work that investigates the theological roots of modern revivalism entitled *Evangelical Heathenism? Examining Contemporary Revivalism* (Canon Press, 1996), Iain Murray’s enlightening historical analysis, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750-1858* (Banner of Truth, 1994), and Hank Hanegraaff’s contemporary expose of the revivalistic fads of charismaticism, *Counterfeit Revival: Looking for God in all the wrong places* (Word Publishing, 1997).

<sup>24</sup> The temper of these revival fads - stressing change by mindless experiences in the guise of seeking God’s blessings - yields a perilous harvest. The crop consists of weeds of neglect - a disregard of God’s authoritative and uncompromising word, a laxity regarding the systematic study of Scripture, and a lack of commitment to regulatory standards reflected by adherence to sound doctrine. Instead of producing a hunger for obeying God’s word, these fads result in famine for *hearing* God’s word.

of discipling the nations. The objective standard for all life and practice is the word of God, not man's feelings or desires or tastes. The whole man - heart, head and body - is to be brought under the Lordship of Christ. The continual search for holiness (growth in grace) by the obedient renewal of the mind will produce confidence and victory because of its Kingdom-orientation.

To those who sanctimoniously censure the charismatic movement, may the words of D. A. Carson give gentle rebuke:

“I do find that there are degrees of unction, blessing, service, and holy joy, along with some more currently celebrated gifts, associated with those whose hearts have been specially touched by the sovereign God. Although I think it extremely dangerous to pursue a second blessing attested by tongues, I think it no less dangerous not to pant after God at all, and to be satisfied with a merely creedal Christianity that is kosher but complacent, orthodox but ossified, sound but soundly asleep.”<sup>25</sup>

My words may be hard, but they are spoken constrained by the love of Christ for His Church. Where do *you* stand regarding these issues? What are *you* going to do about it? And, to the charismatic movement, “*Whither Charismaticism?*”

---

<sup>25</sup> Carson, p. 160.