

Faith Pulpit

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Confusion in the Charismatic Camp

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One startling religious phenomenon of the twentieth century is the rise of the Pentecostal and charismatic movement with its emphasis on the “charismata,” or spiritual gifts. The movement had its beginning in the early 1900’s, a rather recent date in terms of church history. And yet, by the end of this century, Charismatics have infiltrated all mainline denominations and have made strong inroads into Roman Catholicism and evangelical churches. Discerning evangelicals are concerned with a number of problem areas.

Doctrinal and denominational differences are often ignored in light of the Charismatics’ common experience of Spirit baptism and speaking in tongues. Because of their lack of biblical orientation, the Charismatics display a confusion in certain major areas of biblical theology.

I. Confusion About the Experience of Spirit Baptism

A basic tenet of the charismatic movement is the insistence on a second work of grace with a resultant empowerment to perform supernatural feats. This distinctive belief of the Charismatics involves insistence on two baptisms of the Holy Spirit, one at the moment of salvation for every believer (1 Cor. 12:13) and one subsequent to salvation, whereby the Holy Spirit baptizes the individual with power (Acts 1:5). As evidence of the second baptism, the individual is able to speak in tongues. As Basham, a charismatic evangelist, observes about this post-salvation experience: “The baptism in the Holy Spirit is the doorway into the supernatural realm of the Christian life.” Basham agrees with another charismatic teacher that “speaking in tongues is the prayer part of the baptism of the Holy Spirit” (A Handbook on Tongues, Interpretation and Prophecy, p. 34).

We believe it is illegitimate to make Spirit baptism or tongues speaking a second work of grace, as if God had not given us all we need in Christ at salvation. Even if there were a second work of grace, why should the evidence of this experience be the ability to speak in tongues? Why not the ability to teach, to show mercy, to help? The gift of tongues is listed by Paul as the least of all gifts in the order of importance (1 Cor. 12:28), and he further clearly states that not everyone has the gift of tongues. In 1 Cor. 12:30, Paul literally asks, “All don’t speak in tongues, do they?” Obviously, Paul expects a negative answer. The Charismatics insist on just the opposite.

II. Confusion About the Exaltation of the Holy Spirit

The charismatic movement elevates and exalts the third member of the Trinity. The Savior’s teaching on the Church Age ministry of the Holy Spirit is clear. “He shall not speak of himself. . . . He shall

glorify me: for he shall receive of mine and shall show it unto you” John 16:13-14). It is only reasonable that the Spirit-led believer would want to do what the Spirit Himself does, and that is to magnify Christ. How distorted the emphasis of the Charismatics is can be seen by a stroll through any charismatic bookstore. Sometime ago I browsed in just such a store in Des Moines. I counted fifty volumes directly dealing with the Holy Spirit and not a single doctrinal volume on the Lord Jesus Christ. No wonder this unbiblical emphasis leads to unbiblical practices.

III. Confusion About the Endurance of Gifts

Our charismatic friends insist that since the person of the Spirit and His power have not changed, neither have His gifts. All His gifts are still bestowed today. This position is untenable, however, in light of the clear statements of God’s Word that certain foundational and evidential gifts have ceased. Indeed, by the time the book of Hebrews was penned, just before A.D. 70, gifts identified as “signs and wonders and. . . divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost” had ceased (Heb. 2:3,4). The early sign gifts did not occur apart from apostolic contact (Acts 8:14–17). And certainly the gift of apostleship no longer exists. The qualifications of an apostle were that he had to have been a companion of Christ from His baptism and a witness of His resurrection (Acts 1:21,22). Would anyone suggest that people living among us today have existed since the time of Christ? The charismatic insistence that all spiritual gifts must exist today is contradicted by the statement of Scripture concerning the qualifications of apostles.

The gift of tongues, supposedly an evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, can also be consigned to the period of the early church. Paul clearly shows the temporary nature of tongues in 1 Cor. 13:8. He teaches that at the time that prophecies and knowledge shall have been rendered inoperative (passive form of *katargeo*) tongues would have ceased on their own account (middle form of *pauo*). When did prophecy cease? It ceased with the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20) and the conclusion of the New Testament canon (Rev. 22:18,19). When God had established His church and completed His written Word, prophecies were no longer needed. At such a time tongues would already have ceased.

IV. Confusion About the Exercise of Tongues

Even If the gift of tongues were valid for the twentieth century, the Charismatics generally violate several clear guidelines for the proper exercise of that gift. First, when tongues were spoken in the early church, only two or three people could speak (1 Cor. 14:27). In contrast, in charismatic meetings sometimes 5,000 persons speak at once. Second, the speaking had to be in sequence (1 Cor. 14:27), whereas in tongues meetings it is often done at the same time. Third, an interpreter had to be present (1 Cor. 14:27). Fourth, women were not to speak (1 Cor. 14:34), whereas charismatic meetings are comprised frequently of a majority of women, many of whom give charismatic utterances. Fifth, unsaved Jewish people had to be present in the meetings. The sole purpose of tongues was that they be a sign to unbelieving Israel (1 Cor. 14:21,22, cf. Is. 28:11,12). Their purpose precludes their usage

in meetings when only non-Jews are present. Nor is there scriptural justification for the devotional use of tongues.

V. Confusion About the Elements of the Gospel

The newest form of Pentecostalism, known as the Third Wave, or Vineyard Christian Fellowship, was founded by John Wimber. Like the Charismatics before him, he insists on the presence of all spiritual gifts in the church today. But he goes beyond that by emphasizing power evangelism. For the gospel to be rightly preached, miraculous signs should accompany the proclamation to convince the unsaved of the veracity and genuineness of the message. In a recent book one of his disciples writes of the healing mandate of the Great Commission. According to the Commission of Matthew 28:18–20, Jesus’ “disciples are to teach their converts to do everything He commanded them. Must not this include announcing the Kingdom, casting out demons and healing the sick?” (Don Williams in *The Kingdom and the Power*, p. 189). “Christians who do not pursue miraculous signs according to the biblical model of ministry are setting themselves up for Satanic deception” (p. 191). Who is deceived? The elements of the gospel are the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:3,4).

Through total trust in the substitutionary death of Christ we receive eternal life. The apostles preached this gospel, and God granted them supernatural signs confirming the divine origin and complete truthfulness of their message. As was noted above, as the apostles passed from the scene, so did these gifts. This is clearly indicated by the writer to the Hebrews (2:3,4) who reminds second generation Christians of the fact that when they first heard the gospel it was accompanied by various supernatural sign gifts—miracles no longer evident at the time of the writing of his epistle to the Hebrews.

Wimber and his associates also stress the continuing gift of prophecy. However, they draw an unbiblical and thus improper distinction between apostolic prophecy which was inerrant and prophecy communicated through Christians then and now which may well contain errors of fact judgment.

We at FBBC & TS believe that it is unscriptural to insist that all spiritual gifts still exist today. And yet, while we maintain that certain establishing and evidential gifts have ceased, we hold that edifying gifts are still for today. The same Spirit who baptizes the believer into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13) at that moment bestows on the believer a gift or gifts (1 Cor. 12:11). At the moment of salvation the Spirit immerses the believer into the body, implants him into a special place in the body, imparts to him a gift (or gifts), and impels him by His power to be active as a part of the body of Christ.

In A.D. 63 the Holy Spirit still pleads through Peter that everyone use his spiritual gift, that of speaking or serving, to minister to others and to magnify the Lord (1 Pet. 4:10-12). We at FBBC & TS help our students to discover God’s gifts and count it a privilege to train them in the development of these gifts.