

Not Just My Opinion Follow The Narrow Road

By Art Irvine

I generally like talking to those who will talk Bible with me, but I have had several distressing exchanges with people “wrapped up” in the charismatic movement. I am neither an expert evangelist nor do I claim this to be a comprehensive study of the charismatic movement. My intent is first to lay some groundwork reflecting my experience with the charismatic movement, then to express concern for how it has affected the Church of Christ/Christian Church Movement.

The first inference many of the charismatic movement may make is “you do not know what God’s will is, since you do not have the miraculous gifts.” Reciting the Bible to them does no good. Unless they see a sign, something physical, in their eyes you don’t know anything. The second inference is, “baptism is in the Holy Spirit and with miraculous gifts. Without it you are not a Christian.” Never-mind what the Bible says about being “buried with Him through baptism” Rom.6:4; or “see, here is water, what hinders me from being baptized,” Acts 8:36 New King James Version. These people over-spiritualize these texts, thus relieving them of their contextual inferences, that is baptism by immersion in water. Holy Spirit baptism is only mentioned twice in the New Testament, once administered to the Apostles on the day of Pentecost, (Acts 2:1-4) and once to the Gentiles in (Acts 10:44). But these people will infer that Holy Spirit baptism happened at each conversion. Many of them will tell you that there are apostles now, thus the ability to pass on the miraculous gifts. They disregard the selection prerequisites of apostles; “Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to the day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.” Acts 1:21-22, NKJV. When we see those listed as Apostles in the New Testament we need to come back to this passage to see how they became Apostles. Those who may be listed as apostles, otherwise, are not Apostles of Jesus Christ. They may be apostles of the church or of someone else but not Christ.

Some ask, “What of the miracles being done now? Surely you don’t deny that they are from the Holy Spirit, do you?” In response I have taken them to Acts 8:4-24, especially noting that Simon the sorcerer astonished the city “with his powers.” “The Apostles came down, to Samaria, and laid hands on them that they might receive the miraculous gifts.” Phillip could perform the signs but he could not impart the gifts. Simon the sorcerer was doing something that seemed to be miraculous enough to astonish the people. But now he was astonished with the greater miracles Philip and the Apostles were doing. The actual miracles that Philip and the Apostles performed were from God and were much better. The “miracles” these charismatic and Pentecostal people talk about are the same ones that Simon the sorcerer did, not Simon Peter.

If the Apostolic miracles were being done now, we could not keep it quiet. Except for the two New Testament accounts of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the apostles were the only ones who could impart the gifts. There is no record of this gift being handed down. Phillip could not impart the gifts and Simon the Sorcerer was rebuked for trying to buy the gift of imparting these miracles.

In my conversations with charismatics, I find that they depend on the things they can see and hear more than the Word of God. They place greater emphasis on experiences that are more likely to deceive them, instead

of faith in the Word of God. The Bible is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Most conversations have been with nominal charismatic believers. In the brief account above I have tried to represent these conversations typical of the direction and theme of conversations with most charismatic believers. The conversation often ends with them saying “I don’t know how it happens, all I know is, it happens” or “I know what you are saying is what the Bible says, but...” The stronger charismatic will not admit to the Biblical authority you confront him with but may use stronger arguments, with a biblical context, to prove his point. When he is confronted with the truth of the Word of God his arguments fall apart and he resorts to intimidation or anger. They often declare “you are unsaved” or use stronger language to indicate “you are of the devil.” Blinded by subjective experience based on emotion and reinforced by their false teachers, they refuse to believe the Bible. Because they are looking for material things, their eyes are blind and their ears are deaf to the truth. The result is a mystical subjective religion claiming direct knowledge and direct power. This reminds me of the definition for mysticism. The Seventh Webster's Collegiate Dictionary says of mysticism, among other things, “The experience of mystical union or direct communion with ultimate reality reported by mystics;” mysticism is “a theory postulating the possibility of direct and intuitive acquisition of ineffable (that is “inexpressible”) knowledge or power.” Josh McDowell quotes from the same reference when he explains Eastern Mysticism on pages xlvi and xlvii in the introduction to his book “The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict.” Seems to me Eastern Mysticism is a good defining evaluation of the charismatic and Pentecostal religion. They seem to have a kind of mystical, that is “inexpressible, knowledge and power,” supposedly from God.

These people seem hopelessly caught up in the modern day charismatic movement. They must see a sign to believe. This is sight not faith. Their belief is subjective. They can’t quite come to belief in Jesus Christ without the physical signs of modern day miracles.

Some years ago my wife and I actually considered joining this movement but before we made the move we were able to see through this false doctrine. We saw that this crutch is actually a sham. It is a ruse of the devil. True Bible miracles do nothing part way. Either a person is healed or he is not. All attempts to heal, recorded in the Bible, were 100% successful. They did not fail. We have a charismatic and Pentecostal movement, in this country, full of excuses, chief of which is the lack of faith on your part. They cannot produce their claim but you are to blame if you go to them for healing and are not healed claiming, “it is a lack of faith on your part.” Seeking the physical miracles (miraculous gifts) is actually a lack of faith on their part.

This claim of the charismatics to heal disappoints those who are wheel chair bound. A young man suffering from Cerebral Palsy was told in the morning worship at one of these charismatic churches, “come back tonight and you will be healed.” He went back to the “healing service” but was not healed. The preacher may have been very pleasing, spiritual and sincere but when his doctrine of later day miraculous healing was put to the test he came away unable to perform what he promised. In Deut.18:22 Moses admonishes the Israelites to ignore false prophets whose prophecies don’t come true. These charismatics are of the same nature, false healers because they cannot deliver the healings they claim and false prophets when even one of their’ prophecies fail.

Christians don’t need to see physical signs to believe in the salvation of Jesus Christ. John speaking of the signs that Jesus did, said, “...These have been written that you might believe;” John 20:31 New American Standard Version. Signs will not produce faith but reading the word of God does. We only have to look at

the account of the resurrection to see that signs don't necessarily change those that witness them. In Matthew's account (Mat. 28:11-15) the Jews of the time created a lie to cover up the resurrection. Their jealousy clouded their eyes so they could not see the significance of these miracles. Reading the account of the Exodus we find that the great signs accomplished by God through Moses didn't work to change the people's faith toward God. God through Jesus and His Apostles show us what causes a change in faith, "So faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of God." Romans 10:17 NASB. "For we walk by faith, not by sight." II Corinthians 5:7 NKJV. We do not have blind faith. We have the testimony of the many credible witnesses who have written about Jesus Christ and His salvation. We don't need to look for signs to show us the right way. Looking for signs just feeds our selfish wants.

There is another fallacy with this charismatic teaching. When these people become discouraged enough with the charismatic church to give up, most of them give up the whole thing. That is, they do not darken the door of any church building from then on. They have been told, in so many words, they don't have the faith it takes to be a healed . In their eyes, God has failed them, not the false teacher. At the death of their loved one, several co-workers of mine found no comfort in the charismatic congregations they were with. They have since rejected all organized religion. There is hope for those caught up in this false religion and for those who have come away from it with a bad experience. If we don't seek them out for conversion at every opportunity, we will not see results with these people.

Now these charismatic sight-seeking preachers are evangelizing our own people of the Church of Christ/Christian Church. Not only the pew warmer (that is, those who do not desire to take an active roll in the congregation) but some of our preachers are falling victim also. I have personal knowledge of preachers and leaders who are chasing after the big churches and the big money of the charismatics. Maybe they don't actually believe the charismatic doctrine but they see nothing wrong with chasing down the wide road of the charismatics. Jesus instructed His followers to "follow the narrow road." In truth, as I have briefly tried to show, these groups of sight seekers are condemned because they are ignorant of the pattern for faith and the work of the Holy Spirit in these last days.

The Upstate New York Mission newsletter put out by Evangelist Ray Schuh called "The Schuh String" quotes Evangelist Curt Morelock on this subject. "If a Christian admits or even thinks that non-Christians have greater manifestation of the Holy Spirit than they do...that's blasphemy!" The use of the term "non-Christian" in this case means the charismatic (those who believe in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit manifesting modern day miraculous gifts) because most if not all of them do not practice New Testament Christian baptism. They do not believe what the Bible says; "And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" Acts 2:38, NASB. It has a completely different meaning to them. In hearing them preach and talk about it, I hear them say that "baptism" is the baptism of (or with) the spirit. There is no water immersion involved. Some exclude water immersion altogether and others admit that water immersion fits somewhere just not for salvation. As you may have guessed by now, I believe Acts 2:38 means, without repentance and water immersion, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of sins there is no salvation.

If we try to imitate them, to get the big money and the big numbers we condemn ourselves, also. Take care to be steadfast in the Lord and the truth of His Word. When we change our worship style, just to emulate these sight seekers, we are wrong. When we use the same language as they (that is the unbiblical terms used for instance to call down the spirit), we are just as wrong as the sight seekers. We are wrong because we are

chasing after what is condemned and evil. “Beloved, do not imitate what is evil...” III John 1:11 NASB and the King James Version Bible says in I Thess. 5:22 “abstain from all appearances of evil.” The Apostle Paul warned the Galatian church, saying “But even if we, or an Angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.” Gal.1:8 NKJV. This different gospel is one of seeking the physical things that can be seen, heard and felt. The Galatian church believed by faith at the preaching of Paul. The Apostle Paul rebuked the Galatian church for going back to the works salvation in the Old Testament physical things, such as circumcision. “This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith.” Gal 3:2 NKJV. Paul made his intended indictments clear including one of the things he is writing about, the physical rite of circumcision. “But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished.” Gal.5:11 NASB. At this point the Galatian church did not have faith but sight. I have observed that those in the modern day charismatic movement are looking for the physical signs in a similar manor. Jesus said, “an evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign,” Mat 16:4a, NASB.

When we emulate them we chase after all or part of their false gospel. We condemn ourselves also. Do we want to go back, as the Galatian church did, to the old law and physical things? Maybe we should ask ourselves some pertinent and important questions. Is our singing and worship to the glory of God? If we change our singing and worship styles, are we changing them to suite those looking for a “church that looks good?” Do we focus on “the Apostles doctrine, and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayer,” Acts 2:42 NKJV? Do we focus more on what the Spirit can do for us? Have we ignored clear teaching on how we get the Spirit?

I cannot say that a band ensemble is not in decency and order (I Cor.14:40,) but what are our motives? Is the band playing to entertain or attract attention? King David sang, played and even danced to the glory of God. He did not dance in the solemn assembly though and neither should we. Do we sing and play for the same reason? We must determine if our own hearts are right before the Lord before we make any final decision to change “the way we do these things.”

Some years ago I heard an older preacher tell of a man who graduated from Bible college with him. In short the man said, “I don’t know about you fellows but I’m going to make money.” The preacher continued to tell of that certain man that went out changed the worship to the charismatic style and went about attracting anyone that was looking for the physical things. Soon he had a very large following all over the country. But in the process he perverted his doctrine to attract as many as he could. He may not have started out deliberately lying but to keep the big numbers and big money coming in he needed to fabricate lies and half-truths. He was eventually caught in a lie. Oral Roberts would be an extreme example for us but on a smaller scale we could be doing the same things if we do not keep the Lord God in focus.

It seems now, even those who are fairly levelheaded preachers and leaders, are trying some of the tactics of these charismatic sight-seeking churches. I’m sure the thought is to, maybe, catch a few with the things borrowed from these churches. Remember the saying “what you win them with is what you have to keep them with.” Our obligation is to show people Jesus Christ and His salvation, not give them a good time. If you win them with charismatic charm and physical excitement they will continue to need to see these things or they will move on. What a shame it is to look to the denominations to borrow their methods to win people and keep them coming. When Paul said “I am all things to all people,” he didn’t mean he would be a false apostle to those looking for false apostles. Neither should we.

Our integrity should equal that of the Apostle Paul. He was ready to give his life for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He was beaten, whipped, stoned and left for dead, shipwrecked and suffered all sorts of dangers, all for the truth of the Gospel. Some preachers and leaders are getting anxious when they experience a setback in the attendance or offering. They change worship styles, preaching methods and even try to lighten up the sermons to be more “seeker friendly. I don’t see a “seeker friendly” church in the pages of the Bible. Now I hear “Well, do you want your congregation to grow or don’t you?” They are the same concept. These tactics are for those who are afraid of loosing (or not gaining) attendance and the big money or for those who want to compromise the Gospel. Ultimately the tactic is a temptation of the devil.

Lest it be misunderstood, we are not locked into a worship or preaching style, nor am I condemning the larger congregations. However when attendance or offerings dictate worship and preaching style, our motives are obvious. Usually worship and preaching styles do not cause a decline in attendance. It may be our selfishness, or just a temporary lull that some may consider a time of testing. I understand even the new generation will listen if you love them. You don’t need to change anything for them.

Righteousness and holiness are what God desires, not big numbers or a lot of money. These things the world desires. “You therefore be holy as He is holy.” Check your motives the next time you want to change things around. Will the change glorify God or will it satisfy you and those in your community looking for a seeker friendly church? Since we have little in common with these charismatic churches (not even the same God, in my estimation) why are we trying to look like them? “Come away from them and be separate.” Follow the narrow road of life in Christ.

I want to add a note about the title but I waited until the last to add it. In talking with our own people about the errors of the charismatic movement, I have been told, “That’s just your opinion!” The emphatic and dogmatic response leads me to believe these members of the Church of Christ are strong believers in this charismatic Pentecostal religion. It is disappointing to learn that even with the truth in hand these so called believers can be fooled by this false doctrine. After having several confrontations with Christians on this issue, I am doubly aware of it’s importance. I have come out of denominationalism myself and have no desire to return. Please educate your people about this false religion; they most likely don’t know the truth if you haven’t taught them. “Therefore, my Beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.” ICor.15:58, NASB.