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Doctrinal Distinctives Of The Charismatic Movement – Part 2

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If, as was demonstrated in our last paper, the gift of tongues has fulfilled the purpose for which it was designed, and therefore has ceased, what is going on today? That is, how do we explain the present day phenomenon of speaking in tongues, if the Holy Spirit is no longer bestowing this gift upon people. What is the origin of speaking in tongues in the modern church?

Certainly there is more than one origin. Tongues can be demonic, as is demonstrated by documented tongues-speaking in pagan religions. Tongues can be faked for the purpose of peer-approval. After all, if you attend a church which teaches that speaking in tongues is a sign of spiritual maturity, the pressure to conform could be enormous.

My personal opinion is that the majority of tongues-speaking in the modern church is a learned response. In other words, people are being taught, either directly or indirectly, how to speak in tongues. Let's take a look at this theory.

Characteristics of the Modern Movement

The nature of tongues: Clearly, tongues in the New Testament were languages, understandable by those who knew the language being spoken. This is not the case today. Linguists have described modern tongues as a form of ecstatic speech, similar to that which occurs all over the world in many religious practices. Interestingly, the first Pentecostals believed they were speaking in foreign languages for the purpose of propagating the gospel on the mission field. Some early Pentecostals even rushed to foreign countries without any language training, and began preaching the gospel, trusting that the listeners understood them. When it became obvious that they were not understood, these zealous missionaries had to come home and revise their understanding of this phenomenon (see *Christian History Magazine*, "The Rise of Pentecostalism," Vol. XVII, page 2).

The absence of spontaneity: Contrary to the spontaneous and surprising reception of tongues in the book of Acts, modern day promoters of tongues present formulas and instructions designed to teach people how to speak in tongues. Usually these instructions include a prescription to begin by making sounds of some kind, such as by repetition of a phrase.

Charismatics present speaking in tongues as an act of faith. It is something which you must knowingly begin, and trust that God will continue. Larry Christenson, a Lutheran minister, said:

In order to speak in tongues, you have to quit praying in English . . . You simply lapse into silence and resolve to speak not a syllable of any language you have ever learned. Your thoughts are focused on Christ, and then you simply lift up your voice and speak out confidently, in faith that the Lord will take the sound you give Him and shape it into a language. You take no thought of what you are saying. As far as you are concerned it is just a series of sounds. The first sounds will sound strange and unnatural to your ear, and they may be halting and inarticulate (have you ever heard a baby learning to talk?) — (quoted by Robert Gromacki, p. 41, in *The Modern Tongues Movement*)

Harold Bredesen gave these instructions to tongues seekers at Yale:

1. Think visually and concretely, rather than abstractly: for example, try to visualize Jesus as a person.
2. Consciously yield your voices and organs of speech to the Holy Spirit.
3. Repeat certain elementary sounds, such as 'bah-bah-bah,' or something similar. Bredesen then laid his hands on the hand of each seeker, prayed for him, and the seeker did actually speak in tongues (quoted by Gromacki, p. 42).

John Kildahl, in an interesting book entitled *The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues*, explains it this way:

When I hypnotize someone, I begin by saying "lie back . . . Shut your eyes . . . Relax . . . Breathe deeply . . . And listen to the sounds of your breathing as you relax, you can feel yourself getting tired and drowsy." A sample of a tongues leader teaching someone to speak in tongues is, "The Lord is in your presence . . . He is with you now . . . Open yourself to Him . . . Let all your anxieties flow out of you . . . The Lord wants to give you the gift of His Holy Spirit . . . Open your mouth, and He will give you utterance." The hypnotist has essentially a two-pronged strategy: that of sensory deprivation and of developing a special kind of relationship, in other words, a relationship of dependence and trust (p. 37).

Disillusionment: Christenson cites two universal temptations in regards to tongues. One is artificiality — the temptation to think, "I am just making this up." He says to repel this temptation with all vigor. The second temptation is ineffectuality — when the enthusiasm of tongues has dimmed, a person may begin to neglect or cease to use tongues. Christenson says that every gift of God involves stewardship and therefore one must resolve to use it all the rest of his life. This amounts to saying that the "gift" which was sought and begun by artificial means, must be continued at all costs, even when common sense says it is a hollow mockery.

Kildahl claims that when tongues are an important life goal there is always a relationship to a leader or a group which conveys a feeling of acceptance and belonging. If confidence is lost in the authority figure then quite often the person will stop speaking in tongues. Kildahl, in his studies, said he "found no tongue-speaker who was unrelated to a glossolalia authority figure whom he esteemed. Those who had spoken in tongues but were now indifferent to it in this research had in each case had a falling out with the leader of the tongue-speaking group" (p. 53).

The Modern Gift of Interpretation: If tongues-speaking is problematic, the interpretation of tongues is more so. While tongues can be faked, or explained as a heavenly language, interpretations are not so easily handled. The interpretation of tongues is the supernatural ability to understand and interpret a message in tongues for the benefit and edification of the body of Christ (I Corinthians 14:5-19). The progression should be: God gives a message in tongues to Joe who speaks that message at a church service, but doesn't understand it. Sally is then given the ability to understand what Joe has said and relays it to the church. It is at this point that the modern gift of tongues

breaks down most dramatically. A number of studies have been done that are anything but supportive of the charismatic position. Tongues speaking has been recorded and then played back to those claiming the gift of interpretation. In every experiment of this nature of which I am aware, these recorded messages have been interpreted differently by each interpreter. In one instance, John 3:3 was recited in the German language, but the interpreter claimed that Acts 19:2 had been recited in French. Another time Psalm 23 was recited in Hebrew but the interpretation had nothing to do with Psalm 23. Sometimes the interpretation contradicts the clear teaching of the Lord. Interpretation has always been found wanting (see the *Handbook on Tongues*, pages 80,95).

Kildahl and his researchers taped several people speaking in tongues for interpreters:

In no instance was there any similarity in the several interpretations . . . When confronted with the disparity between their interpretations, the interpreters offered the explanation that God gave to one person one interpretation of the speech and to another person another interpretation (p. 73).

Such studies poke gaping holes in views held by charismatics and reveal tongues for what they are — a learned response, not a supernatural gift from the Holy Spirit.

Natural Explanations

Kildahl offers the following possible explanations for the modern tongue movement:

A motor automatism — Some tongues are the result of a trance-like condition.

Ecstasy — Some tongues result from a strong and unusual emotional excitement.

Hypnosis — Due to repeated suggestions as to what is expected of one and the repeated appeals to yield oneself to the “power,” many writers have concluded that hypnotism is frequently involved in causing tongues.

Psychic catharsis — In his research Kildahl found that anxiety was a prerequisite for developing the ability to speak in tongues. Additionally, persons with a low level of emotional stability tended to be extreme in their affirmation of the benefits of glossolalia.

Kildahl, page 40:

Research proved that glossolalists are more submissive, suggestible and dependent in the presence of authority figures than non-tongue-speakers. This was important because one has to follow a leader's suggestions to be hypnotized. Research also proved that tongue speakers think about some benevolent authority person when they began to speak in tongues.

Kildahl, page 54:

Hypnotizability requires that the subject be trusting enough to turn himself over to someone else and place his destiny in his hands. If one can be hypnotized, then one is able under proper conditions to learn to speak in tongues.

Kildahl, page 74:

It is our definite opinion that those who have the necessary psychological characteristics can learn to speak in tongues. This gives rise to the question, “If it is truly a gift of the Holy Spirit, why must it be demonstrated and taught?” I have observed the same routine everywhere I have been:

- 1) A meeting devoted to intense concentration on tongue speaking, followed by
- 2) an atmosphere of heightened suggestibility to the words of the tongue speaker leader, after which
- 3) the initiate is able to make the sounds he is instructed to make. It is the same procedure that a competent hypnotist employs. I have reached the conclusion that tongue speaking is a learned phenomenon.

Other Matters

Why the present interest in tongues?

In our society there is an unsatisfied longing for a genuine religious expression in the midst of the pressures of a secularized society. People are longing for an authentic relationship with God, but they are not as interested in knowing God in truth. If spiritual maturity can be attained attending emotionally charged meetings and receiving instantaneous supernatural experiences that deliver spirituality, why do the hard work of Scripture study, memorization, prayer and walking by the Spirit? The charismatic movement has offered a shortcut to godliness. That this shortcut is really a detour leading people to a dead end, is often not recognized until one has traveled far down this detour and has come face to face with disillusionment. By then many have hopelessly lost their way and know of no scriptural compass to guide them safely back to the path of truth.

“Forbid not to speak in tongues” (1 Corinthians 14:39).

Charismatics will often throw the above words in the face of one who disagrees with their view on tongues. But it must be remembered that these words were written in AD 55 to a group of people who had received this gift from the Holy Spirit to authenticate the apostleship of Paul, and to warn Israel that judgment was coming for their rejection of the Messiah. The Holy Spirit had not yet ceased giving the gift. The purpose for the gift was still alive and well, (see Part I).

The Affects of Charismatic Doctrine Upon Other Areas of Theology

So what? Why not live and let live, after all, what harm does the charismatics' views cause? Why not just leave them alone? These are good questions. If all we are doing is nitpicking over the fine points of Christianity, then we should indeed back off. But charismatic doctrine undermines the teachings of Scripture and authentic Christian living. Below we will briefly outline how the teachings of the charismatics taints, to some degree, every doctrine found in the Word of God. The following are some examples:

Theology in General

Those who teach charismatic doctrines tend to downplay theology. John Wimber said, “When are we going to see a generation who doesn't try to understand this book (the Bible), but just believes it?”

Charismatic doctrine places experience above truth of Scripture. Jack Deere said, “The idea that fallen humanity, can arrive at pure biblical objectivity in determining all their practices and beliefs is an illusion” (*Surprised by the Power of the Spirit*, p. 46). His solution? Experience and modern prophecies. (Read his book)

Both Paul Cain and John Wimber are credited with coining the phrase, “God will offend your mind to reveal your heart” (*The Father's Blessing*, p. 182). This is a reference to the charismatic view that the Holy Spirit will often do an end run around our rational thinking ability, including the understanding of Scripture, to reveal truth to us. John Arnott teaches, “Do not take control, do not resist, do not analyze; just surrender to His love. You can analyze the experience later; just let it happen” (ibid. p. 127). This is a sure recipe for disaster.

Bibliology

There are several concerns here:

Charismatic doctrines undermine the authority of Scripture.

Take, for example, a quote from this charismatic author:

Ultimately this doctrine (the sufficiency of Scripture) is demonic even (though) Christian theologians have been used to perfect it (*Spiritual Warfare*, page 11, Thompson).

They believe in extrabiblical revelation.

Today, after years of practical experiences and intense study on the subject of God's speaking, I am convinced that God does indeed speak apart from the Bible, though never in contradiction to it. And He speaks to all of His children, not just to specially gifted prophetic people. And He will speak to us all in amazing detail (*Surprised by the Power of the Spirit*, by Jack Deere, p. 214).

This is the error of all cults as well as the Roman Catholic Church. If God is still giving revelation today, how are we to discern when God is speaking and when He is not? The charismatics tell us that as long as the revelation does not contradict Scripture, then we can be assured that it is from God. However, that leaves the door wide open for every kind of error. For example, the Roman Catholic Church's doctrines of purgatory, the doctrines concerning Mary, while they may contradict Scripture, for the most part simply add to the divine revelation. The Mormon's view that the Book of Mormon is the story of the gospel coming to America is the same type of error.

It is also their belief that prophets today make mistakes.

Anyone who has experience in helping to nurture "baby prophets" realizes that they have difficulty in distinguishing the words that the Spirit speaks from those that come from their own hearts or even from evil sources. At first they make many mistakes (*Some Said It Thundered*, page XIV). Prophets are, of course, human beings. As such, they can make mistakes and lie. They need not cease to be prophets for their mistakes and failings (*ibid.*, page XVI).

As can be seen from these quotes the charismatic view of revelation would throw the believer into a sea of subjectivity. God considered the authenticity of His Word as so important that He required the death penalty for Old Testament prophets whose prophecies did not come true (Deuteronomy 18:20). How do we discern which prophet is right and which has made a mistake? When do we know that a prophet has spoken truthfully or has lied? Are we at the mercy of fresh revelation or can we still go to the Scriptures to find, "Thus says the Lord"? While charismatics give lip service to the authority of Scripture, in practice their "words of knowledge," prophetic revelations, and messages in tongues reign supreme. Thus the undermining of the Word of God is perhaps the greatest error that charismatics have fostered among God's people.

Soteriology

There are many gospel messages among charismatics since charismatics are found in every type of denomination and church background. Even in denominations such as the Vineyard Church, the gospel often takes such a backseat to the "gifts and phenomenon of the Spirit" that the content of the gospel is muted at best. For example, in John Wimber's book on evangelism, *Power Evangelism*, he never once discusses what the gospel is. The book is devoted instead to what Wimber believes to be the only authentic New Testament evangelism, something he calls "power evangelism." In Wimber's mind "proclamation evangelism," in which a person is shown from Scripture the message of salvation, just won't work. To win substantial numbers of people to Christ one must first soften them up by performing some miracle, or by giving a "word of knowledge." Not only does power evangelism miss the boat scripturally, it also serves to confuse the unsaved. The emphasis is upon signs and wonders rather than Christ. Some are being attracted to the show rather than the cross.

Ecclesiology

Many within charismatic circles hold to some form of dominion theology, which confuses the church with Israel, and teaches that we are looking for a latter day revival that will sweep multitudes into the kingdom and transform society before the return of Christ.

In addition, the majority of charismatics are highly, and unbiblically, ecumenical. Many are actively pursuing reunification with the Roman Catholic Church and some even consider the Pope to be an evangelical Christian.

The purpose of the church is often distorted as they concentrate on the showy gifts (miracles, tongues, prophecies) rather than the balanced functioning of the body.

Eschatology

Some charismatics are not looking for the return of Christ, but for the “latter rain” in which they believe there will be a special outpouring of the Spirit that restores the supernatural gifts to the church and bring a great revival. They do not believe that Christ can return until the world is prepared for Him by the “latter rain.”

Earl Paulk says that the pretribulational rapture position is a “heresy” inspired by Satan to rock the church to sleep. His view is not based upon a thorough study of Scripture, but on a supposedly new revelation from God (*Biblical Perspectives*, Vol. 4, #4, page 6).

Pneumatology

Many believe in a second work of grace often called the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” (see Part I). This baptism gives the believer special powers and gifts. Others, such as the Vineyard Movement, would not agree with the term “baptism of the Holy Spirit,” but teach essentially the same thing. They say the evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives is powers, signs and wonders.

Angelology/Demonology

Angels, demons, and “spiritual warfare” are popular today in charismatic circles. Based upon experience, rather than Scripture, a whole new theology has been developed concerning angels and demons that completely misrepresents the teachings of the Word. See our paper on “Spiritual Warfare” for a better understanding of this subject.

So the charismatic movement is not just a harmless segment within evangelical christianity, but a devastating error that undermines many of the cardinal truths of the Word of God.

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